

# **SABBATH** *in* **CRISIS**

**Transfer/Modification?**

**Reformation/Continuation?**

**Fulfillment/Transformation?**

*by*

**Dale Ratzlaff**

**Foreword by D. A. Carson**



# **SABBATH *in* CRISIS**

A biblical study of the Sabbath in the old and new covenants

- John Zapara, pastor, Vineyard Christian Fellowship, "My honest feeling is that this is the first responsible book on the issue of sabbatarianism I know of. It is thorough and scholarly yet easy reading. You have tackled and satisfied every issue relative to the subject. . . you have tastefully and honestly lead the reader to conclusions based solely on Scripture. Your work will undoubtedly become a reference for all future studies on the subject of the Sabbath."
- Alan Crandall, pastor, Presbyterian, "... I was impressed that your biblical and theological arguments have been carefully constructed. The logic flow is excellent, and at the same time you didn't neglect the reader's need for personal encouragement and faith-building ..."
- Dr. Raymond Cottrell, editor, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, "... My impression is that you have produced by far the best document I have ever read dealing with the subject from this point of view. I believe you have done your best to be fair with the evidence ..."
- Dr. Robert Morrow, educator, "Guylene and I finished reading your manuscript ... We have found it to be highly informative, very persuasive, logical, easily readable and scripturally accurate ... We cannot urge you strongly enough to get this work on Christian bookstore shelves as soon as possible ..."
- Kathy Chick, lay person, "We can't give your study presentation enough praise! You have unveiled so many mysteries about the Sabbath and it is thrilling to see how it relates to our relationship with Jesus. We are looking forward to seeing this in print so it can be circulated and shared with friends."



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**Dale Ratzlaff**

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**Applegate, California 95703**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my wife Carolyn, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for her countless hours spent reading the many versions of this manuscript and her numerous helpful suggestions for its improvement; to sons Bruce and Mike, and to those who participated with us in a seven-month study of the Sabbath.





## FOREWORD

After the publication of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, I was sometimes asked to write a popular revision for ordinary Christian readers without access to the tools and specialist knowledge taken for granted by the academic fraternity. I have not yet done so; indeed, now that Mr. Ratzlaff has completed his manuscript, perhaps I shall never do so.

It is not that we agree on all details: Mr. Ratzlaff allows the evidence to take him where he thinks it goes, and doubtless few will agree with him on every particular. But the merits of his book are three, and they are considerable.

First, his work is accessible to the ordinary reader. If some of the nuances of technical scholarship have been left out, the open and inductive approach of Mr. Ratzlaff has its own merits, and will prove beneficial to many readers simply trying to make sense of what the Bible says about the Sabbath. The summaries at the end of each chapter will help the reader remember just where he or she is in the argument.

Second, Mr. Ratzlaff lets us in on his thought processes and commitments. Though they would be distracting in technical scholarship, they are of particular interest in this case because the author is in fact disclosing his sobering pilgrimage away from Seventh-day Adventism.

Third, the net effect of this book is to open up options in the minds of ordinary Christians, options that have often been closed down by accepted traditions that must be weighed by Scripture, not simply assumed to reflect Scripture. But that does not mean Mr. Ratzlaff is simply

iconoclastic, or fundamentally innovative. Biblical interpretation too committed to iconoclasm or innovation should be viewed with a certain amount of reserve. The fact of the matter is that in its main lines, the author's position is not far removed from the Heidelberg Confession, or from the position of many English Baptists in the 1640s and 1650s.

To the extent that Mr. Ratzlaff succeeds in encouraging thoughtful study of the Scriptures on a topic that is in effect a test of numerous theological systems, to that extent many will owe him a debt of gratitude. And if he encourages some to find their ultimate rest in Jesus (Matthew 11:25–30; Hebrews 4), the courts of heaven will resound with joy.

D. A. Carson



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## SCRIPTURAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Genesis	Gen.	Matthew	Mt.
Exodus	Ex.	Mark	Mk.
Leviticus	Lev.	Luke	Lk.
Numbers	Num.	John	Jn.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Romans	Rom.
Joshua	Josh.	1 Corinthians	1 Cor.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	2 Corinthians	2 Cor.
1 Kings	1 Ki.	Galatians	Gal.
2 Kings	2 Ki.	Ephesians	Eph.
1 Chronicles	1 Chron.	Philippians	Phil.
2 Chronicles	2 Chron.	Colossians	Col.
Nehemiah	Neh.	1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.
Psalms	Ps.	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Isaiah	Isa.	Titus	Tit.
Jeremiah	Jer.	Philemon	Phile.
Ezekiel	Ez.	Hebrews	Heb.
Daniel	Dan.	James	Jas.
Hosea	Hos.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
Micah	Mich.	1 John	1 Jn.
1 Maccabees	1 Mac.	Revelation	Rev.

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## PREFACE

Several years ago I was leading a group of people in a weekly Bible study, and questions were raised regarding the Sabbath. We decided to do an in-depth study of this subject because we wanted to find out for ourselves what the Bible really taught. We prayerfully studied the topic of the Sabbath every week for a period of about seven months. While the bulk of our research was done in Scripture itself, we also studied *From Sabbath to Sunday* and *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, both by Samuele Bacchiocchi, who is considered the leading authority on this topic within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, *The Forgotten Day*, by Desmond Ford, several articles by Robert Brinsmead, and *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, edited by D. A. Carson. These as well as several other works on the Sabbath topic, including a set of taped lectures by Nordon Winger, who had taken his church through a study of the Sabbath, made up our resource materials. I freely acknowledge that many of the insights presented in this book are gleaned from the above writers and lecturers.

Since that time I have done additional study on the topic of the Sabbath and have had many people request that I put this study in book form.

This book is not written to critique the arguments of other authors who have written on this subject. Rather, it merely sets forth my understanding of this topic and the scriptural basis for it. I believe it will serve the needs of all who are looking for a thorough, biblical study of this

subject, whether they are pastors or church laity.

This book at times reflects the inductive method of study behind it. There will be times when you may be left with dangling facts which seem to fit nowhere. Be patient and plow through the apparently barren fields of facts. Near the end the truth will become evident, and what appeared as a desert of miscellaneous detail will then blossom with beauty.

I have chosen to write out most of the Bible references used. However, when this would be too cumbersome, I have summarized the key concepts and listed the Scripture reference for further study. At times I have emphasized a particular word or phrase by putting it in *italics*. Sometimes I have added a word or phrase within a short quotation to help the reader grasp its setting. Words added within a quotation will *always* be enclosed in brackets. I have tried to use each reference in a way which is true to its own context, but I encourage you to look up the verses for yourself.

All Bible references are taken from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. I believe this Bible is one of the most trustworthy English translations available for serious Bible study and I have used it for that reason.

At the end of most chapters I have summarized what I consider to be the pertinent scriptural facts delineated within that chapter. I personally found the summaries to be of great value when I tried to fit all the pieces together. I hope this will also be true for you.

It is my earnest prayer that as you read this book you will be drawn into closer fellowship with the risen Lord and may experience His *true rest*.

Dale Ratzlaff  
Applegate, California  
October, 1990



## Chapter 1

### WHY STUDY THE SABBATH?

Time and again throughout the history of the Christian church, controversy has arisen over the Sabbath. Belief concerning the Sabbath varies considerably. There are almost as many understandings of the Sabbath as there are shades of gray.

Although it is a great oversimplification, Sabbath belief can be divided into three main categories. First, there are those who believe Sunday is the Sabbath of the New Testament. They often refer to it as the Lord's day and see it as a special day set aside for religious service. Those in this group feel free to use "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8), in admonishing Christians to observe the Sabbath, or the Lord's day. Opinion regarding appropriate Sabbath behavior varies widely within this group. Some will not engage in regular employment on Sunday and try to keep at least some of the biblical rules for Sabbath observance.<sup>1</sup> We will refer to this group as Sunday sabbatarians.

The second main group we will call Saturday sabbatarians. In this group are those who believe Saturday is the true, biblical Sabbath and continue to worship on the seventh day. There is also a wide variety of understanding within this group. Some hold the seventh day as the preferred day of worship but see no reason to try to persuade other Christian groups to observe the seventh day. On the other side of the spectrum are those

who worship on the seventh day and teach the seventh-day Sabbath will be God's final test of loyalty for Christians living in the last days before the second coming of Christ. They believe those who worship on Sunday will, in the last days, receive the mark of the beast<sup>2</sup> and the resulting wrath of God described in these words,

If any one worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev. 14:9,10).

A third group we will call nonsabbatarians. These are Christians who believe the Sabbath as a special day no longer exists. They believe it is important to have a time of Christian worship but the day on which it takes place is unimportant. Usually, however, these people worship on Sunday, may also call it the Lord's day, but do not hold it as a sacred day to be revered as do sabbatarians.

We can immediately see the need for an accurate, biblical understanding of this subject. If Sabbath observance is going to be the final test in the last days before the coming of Christ, then we ought to make sure we carefully observe the Sabbath. Certainly none of us wants to experience the wrath of God. If we are going to observe the Sabbath then we ought to find out *for sure* upon which day it is to be kept. However, if Sabbath observance is unimportant, then we ought to have sound, biblical evidence to support our position.

### **Why not do a thorough study of the Sabbath?**

It is never wrong to study the foundation of our faith. Faith must be based upon a foundation of evidence; otherwise faith is folly. If our foundation is trustworthy, a thorough examination of it will only increase our faith.



However, if, after a thorough examination of the biblical evidence, it is found that the timbers of our faith foundation are resting on nothing but damp earth and sand, then something ought to be done about it quickly, before the floods of the last days destroy our spiritual home.

### **Why not keep the fourth commandment?**

While we would not insist that the mainstream of Christianity is always right, nevertheless the fact that so many sincere Christians throughout history have not observed the seventh-day Sabbath ought to cause us to examine their biblical reasons for not doing so. On the other hand, most Christians accept, believe in, and teach that the Ten Commandments are binding upon the Christian yet do not observe the fourth. Why?

### **How does one observe the Sabbath?**

If one is going to observe the Sabbath, whether it be on the seventh day or on the first day, *how* is it to be kept? Are Christians to observe the Sabbath according to Old Testament guidelines? If so, most of us would be under condemnation. If Sabbath observance is derived from the New Testament, there are few, if any, regulations to govern Sabbath behavior. If we take Jesus as our guide and example in Sabbath keeping it does not necessarily follow that everything Jesus did must be emulated. For example, Jesus was born “under law” (Gal. 4:4). He was circumcised as prescribed by the law (Lk. 2:21), yet Paul states, “if you receive circumcision Christ will be of no benefit to you” (Gal. 5:2,3). As a Jew Jesus participated in many of the Jewish feasts. What guidelines do we use if we make the example of Jesus normative for Christian life?



**Does Sabbath observance bring Christian unity?**

Some sabbatarians believe the Sabbath is *the* uniting force among God's true people. However, with such a wide variety of belief and practice relative to the Sabbath, *how* is this unity achieved? How the Sabbath is observed varies widely even among those of the same denomination. Does the history of the church, or denominational history for that matter, demonstrate the uniting influence of the Sabbath?

**Does the Sabbath promote gospel clarity?**

Some Christians believe sabbatarians allow the importance of the Sabbath to overshadow the gospel of Christ. On the other hand, some Sabbath keepers have charged nonsabbatarians with neglecting an important part of Christian duty designed to strengthen real godliness and they see the Sabbath as a vehicle for a better understanding of the gospel. Which is true?

It was seeking definitive answers to these and other questions that formed the basis of the Sabbath study out of which this book was born.

**The Approach**

How is a study of the Sabbath to be approached? Most of us come to this study with at least some previous understanding of the topic. To do a thorough, objective study requires a great deal of discipline, commitment, yes, and even risk.

A highly developed and well-organized belief system can often be the most dangerous blinder to truth. We need only to look at history to see this demonstrated time and again. Jesus told His disciples about His imminent death, but they were unable to comprehend what He said because it did not fit within their theological framework.

Copernicus taught that the sun, not the earth, was at the



center of the solar system. But this concept was not readily accepted because it did not fit within the approved teachings of the day.

Galileo met with the same resistance to his discovery of truth. He could demonstrate his findings by observable evidence. But when he did this, it often only infuriated those who watched. For a person of that day to accept the teachings of Copernicus and Galileo meant that his whole belief system came tumbling down. Many of the religious leaders felt that it was emotionally easier to hang on to the accepted teachings of the time, even if these teachings did have some problems, than to acknowledge new factual evidence which threatened their world view.

For us to entertain the idea that our own belief system may be wrong results in considerable insecurity. People have gone to great lengths to defend the indefensible in order to safely preserve what they considered to be "truth."

Those seeking truth must have a certain reverence for the evidence. The Bereans were said to be

more noble-minded for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

The one who is honestly studying a doctrine must give serious consideration to the evidence which does not fit his belief system. He must be willing, if necessary, to take apart his system of theology and put it back together again to fit the biblical evidence. This is not an easy task. It does, however, bring a great amount of confidence and peace when it is accomplished.

Real truth has nothing to fear from searching investigation. Therefore as we begin this study let us have a certain reverence for the evidence, let us give serious consideration to the evidence which does not fit our understanding of "truth," and let us press on in our study eagerly awaiting the opportunity to understand what the

Bible teaches regarding the Sabbath and how Christians should relate to it.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Sabbath [in reference to Sunday] is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy (Answer 60, of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* as quoted in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, pp. 326, 338).

<sup>2</sup> The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Lord's memorial of creation. "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you." Exodus 31:12,13. Here the Sabbath is clearly designated as a sign between God and His people. The mark of the beast is the oppositet—the observance of the first day of the week. This mark distinguishes those who acknowledge the supremacy of the papal authority from those who acknowledge the authority of God (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 117).



## Chapter 2

### THE SEVENTH DAY IN GENESIS

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (Gen. 2:1–3).

In harmony with what was presented in the last chapter, our goal here at the beginning of our study is simply to find as many pertinent facts as possible: the obvious ones, and also those which may be less obvious. Then from these facts we will draw possible interpretations, but make few conclusions.

A study of these verses leads us to the following scriptural facts: The “work” of creation was completed by the end of the sixth day. God “rested” on the seventh day. God “blessed” the seventh day. God “sanctified” the seventh day. God sanctified the seventh day because *He rested* from the work of creation.

A less obvious fact emerges as we look at the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis. Notice a recurring pattern. After God created day and night on the first day Scripture reads, “And there was evening and there was morning, one day” (Gen. 1:5). After God separated the waters to make the firmament we read, “And there was evening and there was morning, a second day” (Gen. 1:8). This pattern continues throughout the first six days

of creation. (See Gen. 1:13,19,23,31.) However, when we look at the end of the seventh day we find no such formula. We would expect to read, "And there was evening and there was morning a seventh day," but it is missing.

An examination of the literary pattern of the creation record shows that this account was very carefully constructed. Note in the chart below that the first three days of creation correspond to the last three days of creation. With such precise and well-thought-out construction could it be that the omission of "and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day" was not accidental but by design?

### **Literary pattern of the creation record**

#### **Light**

Evening and morning  
God saw it was good  
one day

#### **Sun, moon and stars**

Evening and morning  
God saw it was good  
a fourth day

#### **Water and firmament**

Evening and morning  
God saw it was good  
a second day

#### **Fish and birds**

Evening and morning  
God saw it was good  
a fifth day

#### **Dry land**

Evening and morning  
God saw it was good  
a third day

#### **Animals and man**

Evening and morning  
God saw all that  
He had made, it was  
very good  
a sixth day

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed
---



God rested on the seventh day  
God blessed the seventh day  
God sanctified the seventh day

*No* “evening and morning a seventh day”

There is no mention of the word “Sabbath” in the Genesis account; nothing is said about *man* resting; in fact, man is not even mentioned in connection with this seventh-day-creation rest.

### **What constituted God’s “rest”?**

With the above scriptural facts well in mind, let us seek to discover what characterized God’s “rest.” Was He physically tired or mentally “worn out” at the end of Creation week? Exodus 31:17 reads, “on the seventh day He ceased *from labor* and was refreshed.” “From labor” is not in the Hebrew but was added by the translator. So all we really have is that “He ceased and was refreshed.” The Psalmist wrote, “He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps. 121:4); indicating that God does not get physically tired and need rest as we do at the end of a day of work. Rather God’s seventh-day-creation rest more likely relates to His enjoyment of His creation. He stepped back to view the world in its primeval beauty, which He characterized as “very good.”

What could be more refreshing and restful than for God to be in fellowship with His “very good” creation? What beautiful visions come to mind when we contemplate what it must have been like before weed, decay, or death manifested their ugliness! Blue skies, clear waters, white sands, colorful flowers, and stately trees formed the background as the birds and animals played without fear when God walked through the garden delighted with His work.

One characteristic of that perfect world was that God



had *freely* provided everything needed for the happiness of Adam and Eve. There was nothing for Adam and Eve to do but to enjoy God's gracious provision and fellowship with their Creator. From the Genesis account we cannot determine how long it was before Adam and Eve sinned. One thing, however, we can be sure of: it was after the close of creation's seventh day. That day stands out in Scripture as the *one* day when everything was in right relationship to God. The world sparkled with the freshness of a tropical morning. Adam and Eve held open fellowship with their Maker. Sin and its resulting curse were still unknown. (on earth? in heaven or both?)

We now come to an important question. Did God intend for this "rest" to end at the close of the literal seventh day? According to the Genesis record "the heavens and the earth were completed" on the sixth day (Gen. 2:1). God's work of creation was completed, at least for this world. Adam and Eve had not yet sinned, so the open fellowship and communion which characterized that first seventh day continued. Therefore we could conclude that the *conditions* and *characteristics* of that first seventh day were designed by God to continue and would have continued had it not been for the sin of Adam and Eve. It was not God's design or intent that the open, face-to-face communion with man come to an end. It was not His design that the ground be cursed. No, it was the entrance of sin which interrupted Eden's perfection. "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God" (Isa. 59:2). By creating Adam and Eve with the power of choice, God allowed for the possibility of sin, but it was certainly not His will that sin should exist.

Could this be the reason why the Genesis record omits "and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day"? This does not deny that the first seventh day had no evening or morning, nor does it deny there was another day that followed the first seventh day. The *essence* of



creation's seventh-day rest or the *conditions* that existed on that seventh day were intended to remain.

The Genesis account mentions nothing about man resting. From what would our first parents have rested? Work did not enter until after they sinned. Work was part of the curse of sin.

Because you have eaten from the tree . . . Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread (Gen. 3:17–19).

The rest of that first seventh day was characterized by our first parents freely accepting what God had so graciously provided.

While some have argued that all the “days” of creation are long, indefinite periods of time, the text of Genesis does not support such arguments. Neither is there sufficient evidence, it seems to me, in the whole of Scripture to draw such a conclusion. Rather, I believe we should accept each day of creation as a regular day, marked with “evening and morning” by the rotation of the earth. If the first six days of creation are accepted as regular days, it can be assumed that the seventh day would also be a regular day.

On the other hand we must remember that the seventh day does not have the formula, “and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day.” And, in the very next verse, Moses uses the word “day” for an indefinite period of time at least six days long.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth in the *day* that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens (Gen. 2:4).

Therefore, at this point in our study, we should accept the seventh day of Genesis 2:2,3 as either a regular day marked with evening and morning, or as an indefinite period of time. Both are possible interpretations drawn



from the facts of the Genesis account. One of these interpretations will probably fit our theology of the Sabbath better than the other; however, we are only gathering evidence and looking at possible interpretations.

What does the Genesis account mean when it says God “sanctified” the seventh day? The basic meaning of sanctify is to set apart. In this respect, then, God was setting apart the seventh day from the first six days for a special purpose. “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, *because* in it He rested . . .” (Gen. 2:3). This day was set apart from the first six days because it was the first day after creation was completed. It was, so to speak, a time to celebrate and enjoy the work of His hands. It was a time for fellowship and communion between the Creator and created life. Truly, the conditions of that day were sanctified and blessed.

### **The beginning of a new work**

The Genesis account does not mention an end to God’s seventh-day rest. Rather it is presented as an ongoing state by the omission of the formula “and there was evening and morning, a seventh day.” Nevertheless, it does mention a new “work” which God started immediately after Adam and Eve sinned. We read that “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). This event was the beginning of a “work” which would continue throughout the centuries until its significance would become fully revealed in the death of Christ. The death of that first lamb, while not mentioned as such in the Genesis account, was the acorn of the great truth which, through the following centuries, would grow into the great, spreading oak of righteousness by faith. It pointed forward to Christ’s substitutionary life and death for lost mankind. Naked Adam and Eve were clothed with robes made from the skin of the slain lamb—a substitute who gave his life.



Millennia later Paul would put this same truth in these words.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:27).

Jesus would say,

Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal. They said therefore to Him, "What shall we do, that we may *work* the *works* of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the *work of God*, that you *believe in Him* whom He has sent" (Jn. 6:27–29).

The work of redemption was the work which God started when man sinned and was driven from Eden's rest. This work would continue until man was restored to God's true rest.

### Chapter Summary

1. Creation was completed in six days.
2. God rested on the seventh day.
3. God blessed the seventh day.
4. God sanctified the seventh day.
5. The reason God sanctified the seventh day was because He rested on it.
6. The seventh-day account does *not* have the formula "and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day" as do the six days of creation.
7. The creation record is carefully constructed.
8. There is no mention of the word "Sabbath" in the book of Genesis.
9. There is no command for mankind to rest in the Genesis account.

10. Nothing is expressly mentioned regarding man in the seventh-day-creation rest.
11. The seventh day “rest” of God was most likely characterized by His delight in His new creation and in open fellowship with Adam and Eve in the sin-free, perfect environment of Eden.
12. The conditions which characterized the “rest” of God would probably have continued had it not been for man’s sin.
13. The seventh day of Gen. 2:2,3 may have been a regular day as were the first six days of creation, or it may have been the indefinite period of time.
14. The fact that the Genesis account is so carefully constructed indicates that the omission of “and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day” was not accidental.
15. When man sinned, he was excluded from God’s rest and God began His work of redemption to restore man back to Himself.



## Chapter 3

# THE OLD COVENANT

### Introduction to the Old Covenant

Before we consider the place that the Sabbath holds in the Old Testament, or covenant—the words mean essentially the same thing—it is important that we first see the overall, larger view of the old covenant. We want to get a concept of the size and form of the forest before we examine the trees. One prominent feature of the Old Testament is the covenant, and the covenant has three aspects: (1) the exodus from Egypt, (2) the giving of the covenant at Sinai, and (3) the settlement in the land of Canaan.

The Old Testament is divided into law, history, psalms and prophets, and each relates to the covenant. Genesis gives the history of the covenant people and the covenant-keeping God. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are the books of the covenant, or the books of the law. The history of the Israelites is a history of the covenant people. The kings of Israel were evaluated with respect to the covenant. The Lord said to King Solomon,

Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant (1 Ki. 11:11).

The overriding theme of the prophets is to call Israel and Judah, God's covenant people, back to covenant loyalty. The prophets point out that the underlying reason

for Israel's problems is they have broken the covenant.

The house of Israel and the House of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers. Therefore thus says the Lord, "Behold I am bringing disaster on them" (Jer. 11:10,11).

The exodus, the giving of the law at Sinai, and the settlement in the land of Canaan are inseparably linked in that they are all events connected with the giving of the covenant.

The exodus from Egypt must be seen as a covenant of redemption.

Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians (Ex. 2:23,24; 3:8).

As the great, redemptive activity of the old covenant, the exodus becomes the foundation for many of Israel's laws. The prologue to the Ten Commandments is "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:2).

If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. And when you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. And *you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt*, and the Lord your God redeemed you; *therefore* I command you this today (Deut. 15:12-15).

When your sons ask you in time to come, saying, "What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord commanded you?" then you shall say to your son, "*We were slaves to Pharaoh in*



*Egypt; and the Lord brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand” (Deut. 6:20,21).*

To rightly understand the old covenant laws, we must see them pictured in the frame of the old covenant redemption—the exodus from Egypt.

The redemptive event of the exodus not only serves as the foundation for Israel’s law, it supplies the motivation for obedience. Time and again we find God instructing Israel to rehearse His “mighty deeds” so that they will “not forget” His covenant acts and will remember to keep the covenant laws, and thus receive the covenant blessings. When faced with the apparently overwhelming task of driving out the inhabitants of the land in order to fulfill God’s covenant promise they were told:

If you should say in your heart, “These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?” you shall not be afraid of them; you shall well remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt; the great trials which your eyes saw and the signs and the wonders and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid (Deut. 7:17–19).

The Psalms record the worship of the covenant people, and the mighty acts of God as manifested in the exodus are one of the major recurring themes of Israel’s worship.

Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His loving kindness is everlasting. Who can speak of the mighty deeds of the Lord, or can show forth all His praise? Nevertheless He saved them for the sake of His name, that He might make His power known. Thus He rebuked the Red Sea and it dried up; and He led them through the deeps, as through the wilderness (Ps. 106:1,2,8,9).

After the waters of the Red Sea covered the Egyptian armies and Israel experienced the promised covenant redemption, they broke out in joyous, worshipful cele-



bration to the Almighty God who had delivered them from the Egyptian army.

I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God and I will extol Him (Ex. 15:1,2).

In addition to the exodus from Egypt another major theme of Israel's worship was creation. Their God, Jehovah (YHWH), not only had redeemed them from Egyptian bondage, but He was the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with the psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods, in whose hand are the depths of the earth; the peaks of the mountains are His also. The sea is His, for it was He who made it; and His hands formed the dry land (Ps. 95:1-5).

Thus we find these two dominant themes in Israel's worship: sometimes the exodus, sometimes the creation, often blending to form a beautiful hymn of praise.

The old covenant must be seen as interaction between two parties: God and Israel. While much space is devoted to Israel and its shortcomings, there is also adequate coverage of God and His faithfulness. The book of Genesis outlines the history of the covenant people and the covenant-keeping God. The genealogies trace this history back to the "day" when God and man were in perfect fellowship—that "day" of "rest" when all was "very good."

We see, then, that Old Testament history is indeed *covenant* history. It is a history of the God of creation patiently acting and interacting with man. He will make a covenant with Noah and all the earth. Later He will single



out Abraham as a covenant partner. Then He will enter into covenant agreement with Isaac, Jacob and the “sons of Israel.” With this introduction we now turn to the important covenants of the Old Testament.

### **The Covenant with Noah**

A quick review of the covenant God made with Noah in Genesis 9 reveals that this covenant was made with *all* mankind. No one race or people is singled out. It included not only all mankind, but all animals and the earth as well.

Now behold, I Myself do establish my covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with *every living creature* that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you (Gen. 9:9,10).

The instructions which God gave to Noah include the following:

Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, the blood (Gen. 9:3,4).

This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth (Gen. 9:12,13).

### **The Covenant with Abraham**

The concept of covenant was well known in the days of Abraham. Perhaps this concept springs from the covenant God made with Noah. Nevertheless, not only Abraham (and later Israel), but many of the people living in the ancient Near East were thoroughly familiar with the concept of covenant.<sup>1</sup>

The covenant God made with Abraham was twofold.

And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless



you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:2,3).

First, God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants, then, second, through his descendants, He was to bless all nations. The sign of this covenant was the circumcision of all the males of Abraham's household. (See Gen. 17:9–14.) Abraham became the father of the covenant people, the father of the Jewish nation, from whom God would later bless all nations.

With this brief introduction of former covenants, we now come directly to the Sinaitic Covenant. It is important that we understand this covenant thoroughly.

## The Sinaitic Covenant

### Covenant documents

What comprises the Sinaitic Covenant? The answer to this question is extremely important to our study of the Sabbath. The words “testament” and “covenant” are nearly identical in meaning—a very important fact to remember. Read carefully the following verses.

And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the *two tablets of the testimony, the tablets of stone*, written by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18).

So he [Moses] was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. *And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments* (Ex. 34:28).

*So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone* (Deut. 4:13).

When I went up to the mountain to receive the *tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant* which the Lord had made with you (Deut. 9:9).

And it came about at the end of forty days and nights



that the Lord gave me the *two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant* (Deut. 9:11).

So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the *two tablets of the covenant* were in my two hands (Deut. 9:15).

There was nothing in the ark except the *two tablets of stone* which Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a *covenant* with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt . . . And there I have set the place for the *ark in which is the covenant of the Lord*, which He made with our fathers when He brought them out of Egypt (1 Ki. 8:9,21).

These verses state unequivocally that the covenant between God and Israel which was made at Sinai was the *Ten Commandments*. This truth is underlined by the fact that the Ten Commandments were kept in the “ark of the covenant.” “Then he [Moses] took *the testimony* and put it in the ark” (Ex. 40:20).

Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the *tablets in the ark* which I had made; and there they are, as the Lord commanded me . . . At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the *ark of the covenant* of the Lord (Deut. 10:5,8).

The ark of the covenant was called the *ark of the covenant* because it was the box or container which held the covenant (the Ten Commandments). It was a common practice in the ancient Near East for treaty documents to be placed in the sanctuary of the vassal (ruled party) and a duplicate copy to be placed in the sanctuary of the suzerain (ruling party). Because Yahweh was both the ruling party (in the covenant relationship) *and* Israel's God, the *two* tables of the covenant were *both* placed in the one sanctuary.<sup>2</sup>

Considering the above, nothing could be stated more straightforwardly or more clearly and nothing is more important to a biblical understanding of the Sabbath than the fact that the Ten Commandments are the documents of



the Sinaitic Covenant. The Ten Commandments are the “*words of the covenant*.”

The Sinaitic Covenant, however, comprised more than just the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 21:1 to Exodus 23:33 God gives Moses applications and interpretations of the Ten Commandments. Moses then takes the covenant offered by God to the Israelites and records their response.

Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!” And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord (Ex. 24:3).

Then he [Moses] took the *Book of the Covenant* and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (Ex. 24:7).

The book of the covenant is simply an expanded version of the Ten Commandments written for Israel’s use. This same truth can be demonstrated in the book of Deuteronomy, which means “second law.” A quick scanning through this book will show that most of it is quotation. Moses is repeating to the children of Israel the covenant of the Lord.

These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the Land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them at Horeb [Sinai] (Deut. 29:1).

In other words, the laws and judgments of the book of Deuteronomy become part of the covenant for two reasons. First, they *repeat* the Ten Commandments, the covenant itself, and second, they are a further *interpretation* of that covenant as Moses renewed the covenant with the Israelites as they were about to enter the promised land.



**The “book of the law” interprets  
the “tablets of the law”**

Following are just a few examples to show the relationship between the Ten Commandments, the condensed version of the Sinaitic Covenant, and the other laws, the expanded version of the Sinaitic Covenant. The reader is encouraged to look up these verses, read them in their context and note how they interpret, explain, and apply the Ten Commandments.

1. No other gods
  - a. Sacrifice to another god (Ex. 22:20)
  - b. Not worship any other (Ex. 34:14)
  - c. I am the Lord your God (Lev. 20:24)
  - d. Fear the Lord your God (Deut. 10:12)
2. Not worship idols
  - a. Not make idols (Lev. 26:1)
  - b. Never forgiven for (Deut. 29:17–21)
  - c. Makes God angry (Deut. 32:21)
  - d. Do not turn to (Lev. 19:4)
3. Not take the name of God in vain
  - a. Visit iniquity to four generations (Ex. 34:7)
  - b. Not profane My holy name (Lev. 22:32)
  - c. Put to death for profaning (Lev. 24:16)
  - d. Put to death for cursing God (Lev. 24:10–13)
4. Remember the Sabbath
  - a. Perpetual covenant (Ex. 31:13)
  - b. Put to death for violation (Ex. 31:14)
  - c. Violator to be “cut off” (Ex. 31:14)
  - d. Not kindle a fire on (Ex. 35:3)
  - e. Keep evening to evening (Lev. 23:32)
5. Honor father and mother
  - a. Death penalty for cursing parents (Ex. 21:17)
  - b. Death penalty for hitting father (Ex. 21:15)
  - c. Reverence father and mother (Lev. 19:3)
  - d. Rebellious to parents (Deut. 21:18–21)



6. Not kill
  - a. Killed in a quarrel and fistfight (Ex. 21:18)
  - b. Killed by beating with a rod (Ex. 21:20)
  - c. Killed by ox, first offense (Ex. 21:28)
  - d. Killed by ox, several offenses (Ex. 21:29)
7. Not commit adultery
  - a. With another man's wife (Lev. 20:10)
  - b. With father's wife (Lev. 20:11)
  - c. With daughter-in-law (Lev. 20:12)
  - d. A number of situations (Lev. 18:16–30)
8. Not steal
  - a. Steals an ox (Ex. 22:1)
  - b. Thief caught while breaking in (Ex. 22:2–4)
  - c. Animal grazing in neighbor's field (Ex. 22:5)
  - d. Thief not caught until later (Ex. 22:8)
9. Not bear false witness
  - a. Lied and sworn falsely (Lev. 6:3–8)
  - b. Swears thoughtlessly (Lev. 5:4)
  - c. Not give false report (Ex. 23:1)
  - d. Punishment for a false witness (Deut. 19:18–21)
10. Not covet
  - Not covet gold on destroyed idols (Deut. 7:25)

The relationship of the Ten Commandments to the “book of the covenant” can be compared with the relationship between the U.S. Constitution and the laws of the United States. The Ten Commandments are the “words of the covenant,” while the “book of the covenant” makes application of the Ten Commandments to specific situations in the life of Israel at that time, just as the laws passed by the legislature of the United States were meant to serve as an interpretation of the Constitution to specific situations.

The expanded version of the covenant was placed in a receptacle on the side of ark of the covenant showing its



relationship to the Ten Commandments which were placed in the ark of the covenant.

Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you (Deut. 31:26).

So far we have seen that the Ten Commandments are the “words of the covenant” God made with Israel at Sinai. We have also seen that the expanded version of the covenant—the interpretation of the Ten Commandments to their specific life situations—was also called “the words of the covenant” (Deut. 29:1,9) or “the book of the covenant” (Ex. 24:7). The Ten Commandments were placed inside the ark of the covenant, and “the book of the covenant” was placed at the side of the ark of the covenant.

There is yet a third dimension to the Sinaitic Covenant. In Exodus 31:12–17 we see that the Sabbath is called a covenant.

So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed (Ex. 31:16,17).

Here the Sabbath is called a “perpetual covenant.” It was a “sign” between God and Israel. In the Hebrew Bible if one counts the words of the Ten Commandments he will find the central phrase is “remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.” As the sign of the covenant, the Sabbath is rightly placed in the very center of the Ten Commandments. It is of interest to note that many of the ancient Near East treaty documents contained the dynastic seal in the midst of the document.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, we may look at the covenant documents in three ways: the Ten Commandments are the *very words of the covenant*, the book of the law is the *covenant*



*interpreted* to the life situations of the Israelites, and the Sabbath is the covenant reduced to a sign or dynastic seal.

## The Sinaitic Covenant vs. the Abrahamic Covenant

A quotation from Deuteronomy indicates that the stipulations of the Sinaitic Covenant were *not* included in the covenants God made with Noah or Abraham. Some have tried to read back into these former covenants the requirements of the Sinaitic Covenant. Note how clear Scripture is on this point.

The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb [another name for Sinai]. The Lord did *not* make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with *all of those of us alive here today* (Deut. 5:3).

Moses then lists the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:1–21). The Ten Commandments and the other laws in the “book of the covenant” were *not* given to Abraham or to “the fathers” as part of the covenant stipulations God made with them. However, the Israelites were the descendants of Abraham, and participated in the Abrahamic Covenant blessings. In Lev. 12:1–3 God repeated the commandment of circumcision, indicating its importance in the Sinaitic Covenant.

The Israelites living in the time *after* the Sinaitic Covenant was given could rightly refer to the Abrahamic Covenant and the Sinaitic Covenant as one covenant.

Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac. He also confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant (1 Chron. 16:15–17; cf. Ps. 105).

## Covenant signs

The old covenant had two basic signs or seals. The first was the sign of circumcision. Only those households



where the males were circumcised were included in the covenant. The second sign was the Sabbath. Notice the parallel in covenant language between these two signs of the covenant—Sabbath and circumcision—as recorded in Genesis 17:9–14 and Exodus 31:12–17:

- C. = Circumcision
- S. = Sabbath
- C. “You shall keep My covenant” 17:9
- S. “You shall surely observe My sabbath” 31:13
- C. “Me and you and your descendants” 17:9
- S. “Me and the sons of Israel” 31:17
- C. “And you shall be circumcised” 17:11
- S. “You are to observe the sabbath” 31:14
- C. “Throughout your generations” 17:12
- S. “Throughout your generations” 31:13
- C. “The sign . . . between Me and you” 17:11
- S. “A sign between Me and you” 31:13
- C. “An everlasting covenant” 17:13
- S. “A perpetual covenant” 31:16
- C. “Uncircumcised . . . cut off” 17:14
- S. “Whoever does any work . . . cut off” 31:14
- C. Servant to be circumcised 17:12
- S. Servant to keep Sabbath Ex. 20:10
- C. Sign of circumcision given at time of giving of the covenant 17:1–9
- S. Sign of Sabbath given at time of giving of the covenant 31:18
- C. Circumcision mentioned 6 times
- S. Sabbath mentioned 6 times

The similarities in wording and style are too striking to



be accidental. And the similarity is even more apparent in the original language. For example, “everlasting” (Gen. 17:13) and “perpetual” (Ex. 31:16) are translations from the same Hebrew word, *olam*. It is important that we understand the relationship between circumcision and Sabbath and see the role they play in the Sinaitic Covenant. Circumcision was the *entrance sign* into the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. It was the initiatory or entrance sign of the covenant by which one became a member of the covenant community. The Passover feast was a celebration for the covenant community *only*. In the following reference circumcision served as the entrance sign into the covenant community and thus gave one the right to participate in the Passover (or covenant) celebration.

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it; but every man’s slave purchased with money, *after you have circumcised him*, then he may eat of it . . . if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be *circumcised*, and then let him come to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But *no uncircumcised person* may eat of it” (Ex. 12:43,44,48).

The Sabbath, in a similar way, was the *continuing sign* of the covenant Israel was to “remember.” It was a *ceremony* observed weekly as a *renewing* of the covenant. As in the case with circumcision, if a foreigner were to join in covenant fellowship he was to observe the Sabbath.

The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you . . . or *the sojourner* who stays with you (Ex. 20:10).

Notice how in the time of Isaiah the Sabbath was related to the covenant and how foreigners who joined themselves to Israel were expected to observe the Sabbath of the covenant.



Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people." Neither let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the Lord, "To the eunuchs who *keep My sabbaths*, and choose what pleases Me, and *hold fast My covenant*, to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. Also the *foreigners who join themselves to the Lord*, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, *every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath, and holds fast My covenant*" (Isa. 56:3–6).

Circumcision was given to Israel as the entrance sign into the Sinaitic Covenant community. The Sabbath was given as the continuing sign which Israel was to "remember." Both were important aspects of the Sinaitic Covenant.

### Covenant partners

In many of the above quotations the covenant partners were clearly stated, nevertheless it is important that we thoroughly understand who they were. Scripture makes it very clear that the Sinaitic Covenant was made with the nation of Israel *only*.

The prologue to the Ten Commandments, "the words of the covenant," are,

Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:1,2).

Who were the people who were brought out of the land of Egypt? The people of Israel.

In connection with the covenant of Sabbath (which stood for the whole of the Ten Commandments) we read,

Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, "You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations" (Ex. 31:13).

So *the sons of Israel* shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath *throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever* (Ex. 31:16,17).

Then Moses summoned all Israel, and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing . . . The Lord our God made a covenant with *us* at Horeb [Sinai]. The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with *us*, with all those of *us* alive here today" (Deut. 5:1–3).

Please note the force of this verse. It says clearly that the Sinaitic Covenant was *not* made with "our fathers" (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The Sinaitic Covenant partners are God and the sons of Israel *only*. Others could join the covenant community, but *only* if the males were *circumcised* and all *kept the Sabbath*—the signs of the Sinaitic Covenant.

## Duration of the covenant

How long was the Sinaitic Covenant to last? All Old Testament scriptural references dealing expressly with the giving of the covenant indicate that it was to last forever. The following references are only samplings; others could be listed. Notice how many aspects of the covenant are said to be *perpetual* or *everlasting*. I encourage the reader to look in a Bible concordance and note how many of the entries under perpetual, everlasting, forever, and permanent have to do with some aspect of the Sinaitic Covenant.

It [describing the service of the *lamps* in the tent of meeting] shall be a *perpetual statute* throughout their generations for the sons of Israel (Ex. 27:21).

Thus shall My covenant [circumcision] be in your flesh for an *everlasting covenant* (Gen. 17:13).

And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and bind caps on them, and they shall have the *priesthood* by a *perpetual statute* (Ex. 29:9).

There shall be *perpetual incense* before the Lord *throughout your generations* (Ex. 30:8).



It is a *perpetual statute throughout your generations* in all your dwellings: you shall *not eat any fat or any blood* (Lev. 3:17).

Do *not drink wine or strong drink*, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you may not die—it is a *perpetual statute throughout your generations* (Lev. 10:9).

The seasonal yearly *feasts* are said to be *perpetual statutes* (Lev. 23:14,21,41).

But *pasture fields* of their [the Levites'] cities shall not be sold, for that is their *perpetual possession* (Lev. 25:34).

All the *offerings of the holy gifts*, which the sons of Israel offer to the Lord, I have given to you and your sons and your daughters with you, as a *perpetual allotment*. It is an *everlasting covenant* of salt before the Lord to you and your descendants with you (Num. 18:19).

With rare exception everything connected with the covenant God made with Israel was said to be permanent, perpetual, everlasting, forever, or “throughout your generations.” It was not until Israel had broken the covenant and the nation was headed into captivity that we get mention of a new covenant.

## The purpose of the covenant

The covenant served as the basis of the relationship that existed between God and Israel. There were blessings and cursings associated with the covenant: blessings if Israel was obedient and kept the covenant, and cursings if Israel disobeyed and forsook the covenant. The covenant agreement also included provision for forgiveness if Israel sinned but later repented and returned to God.

One purpose the covenant held was to be a witness or testimony between God and Israel. When Israel disobeyed, they had no excuse when the cursing came upon them, for the “testimony” was there. In fact, the



very presence of Israel in captivity was a witness of God's faithfulness as a covenant partner.

Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has *confirmed His words* which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity (Dan. 9:11,12).

The covenant was said to be written on two tablets of stone (Ex. 34:1). Artists often picture these tablets as written only on one side. But Scripture states they were written on both sides.

Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other (Ex. 32:15).

The tablets of the covenant served a purpose much like a present-day contract. Today when we purchase a car or a home with a bank loan we get one copy of the contract (covenant) and the bank keeps a second, *identical copy* of the contract. In like manner some feel these two tables of the covenant were identical.<sup>4</sup> One copy was for the vassal (Israel) and the other was for the Suzerain (God).<sup>5</sup> The expanded version of the covenant, called "the book of the law," was placed at the side of the ark and later copied so Israel could have free access to the stipulations of the covenant.

## **Violations of the covenant**

It is important to recognize that a serious violation of *any* of the covenant stipulations could "break" the covenant. This could be a violation of the basic covenant, the Ten Commandments; a violation of one of the covenant signs, that of the Sabbath or circumcision; or a violation of the "book of the covenant." In such cases the



people were to be “cut off” from the covenant community. As one can break the laws of the United States by desecrating the flag (until a recent Supreme Court decision), directly violating the Constitution, or disobeying the laws passed by the legislature, so a violation of any form of covenant law was a violation of the covenant.

But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant . . . (Lev. 26:14,15).

When Moses was on his way to Egypt “It came about at the lodging-place on the way that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death.” At this point Zipporah, the wife of Moses, circumcised their sons “So He [the Lord] let him alone” (Ex. 4:24,25). This incident shows how important it was for man to comply with the sign of the covenant if he expected God’s covenant blessings. In this case even Moses was considered a violator of the covenant and would have been killed or “cut off” from the covenant community had he not complied with the sign of the covenant—a sobering thought indeed!

God allowed for a difference in punishment between intentional and unintentional sin.

Also if one person sins unintentionally, then he shall offer a one year old female goat for a sin offering . . . The person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people (Num. 15:27,30).

In this same context a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. He was put in custody and

Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” So all the congregation brought him outside the camp, and stoned him to death



with stones, just as the Lord had commanded Moses (Num. 15:32–36).

Note the many ways one could be “cut off” from the covenant people:

### **The offense:**

### **Scripture:**

Not circumcised	Gen. 17:14
Breaking the Sabbath	Ex. 31:14
Eating anything leavened	Ex. 12:15
Misuse of anointing oil	Ex. 30:33
Misuse of incense	Ex. 30:38
Eating sacrifice while unclean	Lev. 7:20
Misuse of sacrifice	Lev. 7:21
Eating fat of sacrifice	Lev. 7:25
Eating blood	Lev. 7:27
Killing sacrifice wrongly	Lev. 17:1–4
Incest	Lev. 18:6–18, 29
Intercourse during menstruation	Lev. 18:19, 29
Homosexual activity	Lev. 18:22, 29
Intercourse with animals	Lev. 18:23, 29
Eating a sacrifice wrongly	Lev. 19:1–8
Offering children to Molech	Lev. 20:3
Contact with spiritists	Lev. 20:6
Not humbling oneself	Lev. 23:29
Neglecting the Passover	Num. 9:13

### **Covenant characteristics**

Those who start to read the Bible through usually do well until they come to the latter part of Exodus. From there through Deuteronomy it is usually rough going because they get bogged down in all the *laws*. These books contain literally hundreds of laws because the Sinaitic Covenant is a *law covenant*. While God’s grace was represented in His gracious provision of forgiveness on condition of repentance and the offering of certain



sacrifices, the emphasis, nonetheless, is on law. It is characteristically a *law covenant*.

Not only is this covenant primarily law, but it is law in *great detail*. This covenant law does not simply ask people to bring an offering to the Lord, but it spells out exactly what kind of an offering to bring.

You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male lambs one year old for a sacrifice of peace offerings (Lev. 23:19).

This law does not simply say to bring a cereal offering, but it tells how much cereal to bring and how to mix it.

Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil (Lev. 23:13).

This law does not simply say bring oil but it instructs the people to bring “clear oil from beaten olives” (Lev. 24:2).

This law does not simply say to bring cakes of bread to the Lord but:

You shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. And you shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the pure gold table before the Lord (Lev. 24:5,6).

This great detail of law is characteristic of the Sinaitic Covenant. I am reminded of times when I was teaching high school students, especially the freshmen. I was forced to go into great detail in making my assignments. Anything that could be misunderstood often was. I could not just say, “Answer these questions,” but would have to instruct them to “Write answers to questions 1–10, page 56, and be ready to turn them in at the beginning of class on Tuesday, September 25. Please use 8 1/2 x 11 lined paper and write clearly. Place your name in the upper left-hand corner and the date in the upper right-hand corner.” From the great amount of detail and minute instructions included in the old covenant it appears that



God was treating the Israelites as children. Israel had just spent several hundred years in slavery to Egypt, and God met them where they were.

Another characteristic of the Sinaitic Covenant is that it is a *mediated covenant*.<sup>6</sup> Moses, and later Joshua and other leaders, served as a mediator between God and the sons of Israel. What the people knew about God they received through a mediator (Ex. 24:1–7). Only the prophet, priest, and certain other *leaders* of the people were filled with the Holy Spirit and had a *personal* knowledge of God. At times this mediatorial role was even intercessory. When the Israelites were bitten with snakes, Moses *interceded* with God and God gave him directions for making the brazen serpent. If the snake-bitten Israelite simply looked at the uplifted serpent he lived (Num. 21:4–9). On one occasion when the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron,

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.” Then they fell on their faces . . . Then Aaron took it [the censer of incense] as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. And he took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked (Num. 16:44–48).

### Chapter Summary

1. The Sinaitic Covenant does not nullify the covenant provisions of the former covenants made with Noah and Abraham.
2. The stipulations of the Sinaitic Covenant were not a part of the covenant God made with Noah or Abraham.
3. The documents of the Sinaitic Covenant are three:
  - a. The Ten Commandments are the words of the Sinaitic Covenant.



- b. The “other laws” found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are the expanded version of the Sinaitic Covenant and are called “the book of the covenant,” or “the book of the law.”
- c. The Sabbath was the sign of the Sinaitic Covenant and could stand for the covenant.
- 4. The “book of the law” interpreted and applied the “tables of the law” to specific situations in the life of Israel.
- 5. The signs of the Sinaitic Covenant were circumcision and the seventh-day Sabbath.
- 6. The wording of the covenant of circumcision is nearly identical with the wording of the covenant of Sabbath. What is said of one is said of the other.
- 7. The covenant partners were God and the nation of Israel only. No other people were included within this covenant.
- 8. The provisions of the Sinaitic Covenant were open to others, but *only* if they were circumcised, kept the Sabbath and were willing to abide by all the covenant stipulations.
- 9. The duration of the Sinaitic Covenant was said to be forever, eternal, perpetual, or “throughout your generations.”
- 10. The purpose of the covenant was to provide the basis of fellowship between God and Israel and to serve as a witness in case of covenant violations.
- 11. Violations of the covenant included violations of the Ten Commandments, the other laws in the “book of the covenant,” or the signs of the covenant: Sabbath and circumcision.
- 12. Provision was made for the difference between intentional and unintentional sin.
  - a. An Israelite was put to death or cut off from the covenant community for intentional sin.

- b. An Israelite who committed unintentional sin was provided atonement conditional on the fulfillment of certain sacrifices.
- 13. The Sinaitic Covenant is characteristically a law covenant.
- 14. The Sinaitic Covenant is minutely detailed as if it were written for the immature person.
- 15. The Sinaitic Covenant is a mediated covenant with a key leader standing between God and the sons of Israel.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, pp. 13,14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> See D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 151ff.



## Chapter 4

# SHADOWS OF HOPE

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to get an overview of the religious services connected with the Sinaitic Covenant, to discover how and why the Sabbath was observed in the the Old Testament and to observe relationships between the Sabbath and other old covenant ceremonies. It will not serve our purpose to get bogged down in the details of the old covenant sacrificial services or rituals. This chapter will, of necessity, cover a vast amount of material. Passages closely related to our topic have been included. In places you may want to scan some of the miscellaneous detail. If you do, however, please note that which is in *italics* as this will prove important to our study. Some of the evidence in this chapter will not have immediate application. However, it will prove to be of enormous value for later understanding.

### Covenant Convocations

In this section we will look at an array of religious services prescribed within the Sinaitic Covenant linked to a specific time for their performance.

Leviticus 23 lists many of the appointed times or holy convocations for the covenant people.

The Lord spoke again to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, ‘The Lord’s appointed

times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations —*My appointed times* are these''' (Lev. 23:1,2).

## The seventh-day Sabbath

For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings (Lev. 23:3). So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath *throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant* (Ex. 31:16).

## The Passover

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month . . . is the Lord's Passover (Lev. 23:5). Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; *throughout your generations* you are to celebrate it as *a permanent ordinance* (Ex. 12:14).

## The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is a Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days . . . on the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall *not do any laborious work* . . . on the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall *not do any laborious work* (Lev. 23:6–8). You also shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread . . . *you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance* (Ex. 12:17).

## First fruits

You shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest . . . on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it . . . *it is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations* (Lev. 23:10–14).

## Pentecost

You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the



Lord . . . *you shall do no laborious work*. It is to be a *perpetual statute* in all your dwelling places *throughout your generations* (Lev. 23:15–21).

## **Blowing of trumpets**

In the seventh month on the first of the month, you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. *You shall not do any laborious work* (Lev. 23:23–25).

## **Day of Atonement**

On exactly the tenth day of the seventh month is the day of atonement . . . It is to be a *sabbath of complete rest to you* (Lev. 23:27–32).

And this shall be a *permanent statute* for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls, and *not do any work*, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you . . . *It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you . . . it is a permanent statute* (Lev. 16:29,31).

## **Feast of Booths**

On the fifteenth of the seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the Lord. On the first day is a holy convocation; *you shall do no laborious work of any kind* . . . On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation . . . *You shall do no laborious work* . . . *It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations* . . . So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the Lord (Lev. 23:33–44).

## **New Moons**

Then at the beginning of each of your months you shall present a burnt offering to the Lord (Num. 28:11). To offer burnt offerings morning and evening, *on sabbaths and on new moons* and on the appointed feasts of the Lord our God, *this being required forever in Israel* (2 Chron. 2:4).



## Sabbatical years

Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, “When you come into the land which I shall give you, then *the land shall have a sabbath to the Lord*. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crops, but *during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord*; you shall *not* sow your field *nor* prune your vineyard. Your harvest aftergrowth you shall *not* reap, and your grapes of trimmed vines you shall *not* gather; *the land shall have a sabbatical year*. And all of you shall have the *sabbath products* of the land for food: yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat” (Lev. 25:2–7).

## Jubilee

You are to count off *seven sabbaths of years* for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the *seven sabbaths of years*, namely, *forty-nine years*. You shall then sound a ram’s horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; *on the day of atonement* you shall sound a horn all through your land. You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and *proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants*. *It shall be a jubilee for you and each of you shall return to his family*. You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee: you shall *not* sow, *nor* reap its aftergrowth, *nor* gather in from its untrimmed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. *You shall eat its crops out of the field . . .* But if you say, “What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?” then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for *three years* (Lev. 25:8–12,20,21).

In the preceding references we see a developing sabbatical cycle: the weekly Sabbath, the seven annual, or seasonal sabbaths, every seven years a sabbatical year, every seven sabbatical years a Jubilee.



In each of these “Sabbaths” we find that work is prohibited. They are all called “holy” or are said to be a “Sabbath to the Lord.” Animals as well as the land itself are included in the “rest.” There is an underlying sense of freedom in the Sabbath concept. Everyone is free from the responsibility of work: the Israelites, the slaves, the foreigners, the animals and even the land itself. There seems to be a rising crescendo in the sabbatical cycle which reaches its peak in the Jubilee. On that fiftieth year there was a whole year of Sabbaths, a special sabbatical year! The Jubilee was ushered in on the Day of Atonement by the blowing of a ram’s horn. The Jubilee was a time of release to the members of the covenant community, a time to return to the family property, a time to cancel all debts, a time to wipe the record clean and begin anew. It was designed to be a joyous time of celebration and fellowship!

As joyful as the Jubilee sounds, there is no record it was ever observed. It seems to have been something that was written about but never experienced. Perhaps the people were too selfish to proclaim freedom to all the inhabitants of the land. Perhaps they were too fearful of monetary loss should they not sow or reap. Whatever the reason, the celebration of the Jubilee seems to have remained for the “days to come” when God would give them *three years’* worth of blessings!

### **Sabbath Observance**

When it comes to Sabbath observance the Old Testament is very specific. It should be noted that the following Sabbath laws usually apply to *all* the Sabbaths, not just the weekly Sabbaths. I have included all the Old Testament rules for Sabbath observance. It should be noted that some of these are not from the books of the law and serve as a biblical interpretation of the original Sabbath commands.



## Things not to do on the Sabbath:

### *Do not go out of your place.*

Then the Lord said to Moses . . . Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day (Ex. 16:29).

### *Do not bake or boil.*

This is what the Lord meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning (Ex. 16:23).

### *Do not do any work.*

But the seventh day is a sabbath unto the Lord your God; in it *you shall not do any work*, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you (Ex. 20:10).

The prohibition of working is set forth in very clear terms.

You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest, even during plowing time and harvest you shall rest (Ex. 34:21).

### *Do not build a fire.*

These things are the things that the Lord has commanded you to do . . . You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day (Ex. 35:1,3).

### *Do not carry a load.*

But if you do not listen to Me to keep the sabbath day holy *by not carrying a load* and coming in through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I shall kindle a fire in the gates, and it will devour the palaces of Jerusalem and not be quenched (Jer. 17:27; cf. Neh. 13:15).



***Do not buy or sell.***

As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day (Neh.10:31; cf. Amos 8:5ff.).

***Do not do your own pleasure.***

If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot *from doing your own pleasure* on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honorable, and shall honor it, *desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word . . .* (Isa. 58:13,14).

**Things to do on the Sabbath:*****Keep it holy.***

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8).

***Rest.***

For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest (Ex. 31:15).

***Observe or celebrate.***

So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant (Ex. 31:16).

***Delight in the Lord.***

Then you will take delight in the Lord (Isa. 58:14).

**Time of Sabbath observance:**

“From evening until evening you shall keep your sabbaths” (Lev. 23:32). It should be noted that this instruction is given in connection with the day of



atonement but was interpreted by the Jews to apply to all Sabbaths.

### **Penalties for violation of Sabbath law:**

#### ***Put to death.***

Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Every one who profanes it shall surely be *put to death* . . . Whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death (Ex. 31:14,15).

For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a sabbath of complete rest to the Lord; whoever does *any work on it shall be put to death* (Ex. 35:2).

#### ***Cut off from Israel.***

Whoever does any work on it, that person shall be *cut off* from among his people (Ex. 31:14).

### **Reflections of Eden**

As we look at what the covenant people were either told to do, or told not to do, on the Sabbath, and then reflect back upon the first seventh-day rest at the end of creation week, there seems to be a definite connection. It appears that the Sabbath laws given to the Israelites were designed to cause them to behave very much as Adam and Eve behaved in Eden. While this fact is not clearly brought out in the scriptural record, it is strongly implied in the wording of the fourth commandment.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (Ex. 20:11).

Nearly all the prohibitions given in connection with these Sabbaths would have been completely meaningless to Adam and Eve on that first seventh day *before sin*



*entered.* On the other hand, what Israel was commanded to do on the Sabbath would have been done naturally by Adam and Eve, therefore, no command would have been needed. Consider the following reasoning:

### **Prohibitions:**

***Do not go out of your dwelling place.*** Adam and Eve did not leave the garden until *after* sin entered.

***Do not bake or boil.*** We have no record of Adam and Eve using fire in their Eden home. Some assume they ate their food fresh from the garden.

***Do not do any work.*** Adam and Eve did not “work” until after they sinned and were driven from the garden (Gen. 3:17–19). The Genesis account does mention that they were to “cultivate and keep” the garden. But whatever is intended here certainly was not work, nor was this activity what comes to our mind when we think of cultivating our gardens which flourish with weeds.

***Do not carry a load.*** There was no need for Adam and Eve to carry a load or burden. What would they have carried? They did not have to store their crops for winter. They surely did not have irrigation pipes or shovels etc., for a “mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground” (Gen. 2:6).

***Do not build a fire.*** Before sin entered, clothes were not even needed, therefore we might assume that the weather was not cold and a fire was not needed.

***Do not buy or sell.*** Whom would they have purchased from and to whom would they have sold? They were told to eat “freely . . .”

***Do not do your own pleasure.*** With the brevity of the written record in Genesis it is difficult to prove how this would or would not have applied to our first parents. Before sin entered into the lives of Adam and Eve we might assume it would have only been natural for God to be first in their thinking.



**Admonitions:**

***Keep the Sabbath holy.*** Holiness is a term used for something that is set apart for God or is connected to Him in some way. This would automatically have been carried out in Eden as perfect Adam and Eve were in perfect fellowship with their Creator.

***Rest.*** If we understand the “rest” of the seventh-day-creation record to be fellowship with God, this admonition would have been unneeded as it was the activity most cherished in the garden. God had provided everything man needed for health and happiness.

***Observe, do, or celebrate.*** There would have been no need to tell our first parents to do these things, because the very doing of these things was that of which their life consisted.

***Delight yourself in the Lord.*** It must have been Adam and Eve’s highest delight to fellowship with their Maker in that perfect Eden home.

In connection with the greatest of the Sabbaths of the covenant people, the Jubilee, Israel was told “it shall be holy to you, you shall eat its crops out of the field” (Lev. 25:12). The Creator’s words to Adam and Eve were “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely” except from the tree in the middle of the garden (Gen. 2:16,17). The behavior of Adam and Eve on that first seventh day must have been very much like the directions given to Israel for the observance of Jubilee.

The Sabbaths of the old covenant appear to be “mini rest stops.” They were like a “pretend game” where Israel behaved like Adam and Eve on that first seventh day, the big difference being that Adam and Eve were in open fellowship with the Creator, a fellowship which was not hindered by sin. The Israelites, on the other hand, did not even desire to be in God’s presence.

And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the



mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die" (Ex. 20:18,19).

Yet, within the Sabbath concept there were shadows of hope, hints of better things to come. While on the one hand the Sabbaths pointed the Israelites back to the perfect fellowship of the seventh-day-creation "rest," the Sabbaths also directed their tired souls forward to the time when the fellowship of that seventh day would be restored. The Sabbaths gave them reason to look forward with hope to that time when freedom would be proclaimed to the captives, when that year of release from all debt would arrive. They eagerly awaited the time they could return to the land of the fathers, when they could again eat freely the natural produce of the land, when they could cease from their heavy burdens and enter into the "rest" of the Jubilee. Each of the Sabbaths pointed them forward with hope to the next sabbatical event. The seventh-day Sabbath was a weekly reminder of the coming seasonal sabbath. The seasonal sabbaths were a reminder of the coming sabbatical year. The sabbatical year was a reminder of the coming Jubilee. They kept hope alive.

### **Sabbath Relationships**

While some of the following may appear to be somewhat repetitious, nevertheless this information is very important to a thorough understanding of the Sabbath and will be needed for later interpretations.

In the following references be aware of the close association between the seventh-day Sabbath and the other religious duties connected with the Sinaitic Covenant, such as the morning and evening burnt offerings. Note especially the close connection between the seventh-day Sabbaths, the new moons, and the seven yearly sabbaths or "fixed festivals." Recognize that when these convoca-

tions of the old covenant are listed as a group they usually appear in either ascending or descending order.

Sabbaths (days)  
new moons (months)  
fixed festivals (seasons)

*or*

fixed festivals (seasons)  
new moons (months)  
Sabbaths (days)

This is brought out here as it will be of importance for later interpretations.

. . . and to offer all *burnt offerings* to the Lord, on the *sabbaths*, the *new moons* and the *fixed festivals* in the number set by the ordinance concerning them, continually before the Lord (1 Chron. 23:31).

Behold, I am about to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, dedicating it to Him, to *burn fragrant incense* before Him, and to set out the showbread continually, and to offer *burnt offerings* morning and evening, on *sabbaths* and on *new moons*, and on the *appointed feasts* of the Lord our God, *this being required forever in Israel* (2 Chron. 2:4).

Then Solomon offered *burnt offerings* to the Lord on the altar of the Lord which he had built before the porch; and did so according to the daily rule, offering them up according to the commandment of Moses, for the *sabbaths*, the *new moons*, and the three *annual feasts*—the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles (2 Chron. 8:12,13).

He also appointed the king's portion of his goods for the *burnt offerings*, namely, of the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the *sabbaths* and for the *new moons* and for the *fixed festivals*, as it is written in the law of the Lord (2 Chron. 31:3).

And it shall be the prince's part to provide the *burnt offerings*, the *grain offering* and the *drink offerings*, at the *feasts*, on the *new moons*, and on the *sabbaths*, as all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel (Ez. 45:17).



The following references show a close relationship between the Sabbath and the new moon celebrations. Observe that they have nearly identical offerings prescribed for them.

The gate of the inner court shall be shut the six working days; but it shall be opened on the *sabbath day*, and opened on the *day of the new moon* . . . The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the Lord on the *sabbaths* and on the *new moons* . . . And the burnt offering which the prince shall offer to the Lord on the *sabbath day* shall be *six lambs* without blemish and a *ram* without blemish . . . the *grain offering* . . . a *hin of oil* . . . And on the day of the *new moon* he shall offer . . . *six lambs* and a *ram*, which shall be without blemish . . . a *grain offering* . . . a *hin of oil* . . . (Ez. 46:1–7).

I will also put an end to all her gaiety, her *feasts*, her *new moons*, her *sabbaths*, and all her *festal assemblies* (Hos. 2:11).

Why will you go to him today? It is neither *new moon* nor *sabbath* (2 Ki. 4:23).

. . . for the continual *burnt offering*, the *sabbaths*, the *new moon*, for the appointed times . . . (Neh. 10:33).

Bring your worthless offerings no longer, their incense is an abomination to Me. *New moon* and *sabbath*, the *calling of assemblies*—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your *new moon festivals* and your *appointed feasts* . . . (Isa. 1:13,14).

“And it shall be from *new moon* to *new moon* and from *sabbath* to *sabbath*, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says the Lord (Isa. 66:23).

In the foregoing references we see a very close connection between the Sabbath and the yearly feasts or “appointed times of the Lord.” Notice that when the word “Sabbath” is used in connection with the other “times of the Lord,” it *always* refers to the seventh-day Sabbath.

### Covenant Relationships

In the last section, “Sabbath Relationships” we saw



how the Sabbath is closely related to all the other covenant *convocations*. This section will show how the Sabbath is tied to the *whole* Sinaitic Covenant.

The Sabbath is related to the Ten Commandments in that it is one of the Ten Commandments; it finds itself at the very center of the Ten Commandments and it is the seal of the covenant (Ex. 20:8–11; Ex. 31:13–18). Thus, the Sabbath of Sinai is inseparably linked to the Sinaitic Covenant.

The Ten Commandments are related to the ark of the covenant. The ark was the special wooden box in which the covenant was placed (Ex. 25:16). Thus, the Sabbath is related to the ark of the covenant.

The ark of the covenant was placed in the most holy place of the “tabernacle of the testimony” (Ex. 38:21; Num. 1:50,53). The ark, the Ten Commandments, and the Sabbath are all related to the tabernacle of the testimony. So we see that the Sabbath is related to the tabernacle of the testimony.

The tabernacle of the testimony was the center for the worship of the covenant people. They were directed to take their offerings there. The priests were directed to offer special offerings there on the Sabbath. The weekly Sabbath is related to *all* the other religious services of the covenant people as they worship around the tabernacle of the covenant according to covenant stipulations (2 Chron. 2:4).

The religious celebration of the covenant had a strong underlying sabbatical cycle. There were Sabbaths every seven days (Lev. 23:1–3). There were seven seasonal Sabbaths—each of which was observed as a seventh-day Sabbath (Lev. 23). Every seven years there was a sabbatical year when the land was to have “a sabbath to the Lord” (Lev. 25:1–7). The high point of the sabbatical cycle was the Jubilee. It was a special sabbatical year, a whole year of Sabbaths with additional blessings including



the proclamation of freedom to the captives (Lev. 25: 8–17). All of these observances had their foundation in the covenant of which the Sabbath was the sign. Thus, the Sabbath was closely connected to *all* covenant celebrations.

As the Sinaitic Covenant partners were God and Israel and the Sabbath was a sign between God and the sons of Israel forever (Ex. 31:17), the Sabbath is therefore inseparably linked to the “sons of Israel forever.”

To become a member of the covenant community the males of every household had to be circumcised (Gen. 17: 9–14; Lev. 12:3) and all had to observe the Sabbath (Ex. 31:13–17; Isa. 56:1–8). A foreigner was forbidden to partake in the covenant celebrations unless he was circumcised (Ex. 12:48). If you take away circumcision, then you take away the covenant people. If you take away covenant people, then you must take away the Sabbath of Sinai, for it is the sign between God and the covenant people. Therefore, the Sabbath and circumcision were closely linked as signs of the covenant.

The covenant blessings and promises were specifically related to the “covenant people” living in the “promised land” (Gen. 13:15; Deut. 4:40). The borders of this land were clearly spelled out in the book of the covenant (Deut. 1:6,7; Deut. 3). The land which was to enjoy its Sabbaths was the “promised land.” Thus the promised land and the Sabbath were closely linked (Lev. 25:1–4; 26:34,35). Nothing could be more clearly stated. Everything in the covenant was related to everything else in the covenant and the seventh-day Sabbath is in the very heart of these complex relationships.

A correct understanding of the seventh-day Sabbath requires that we see it *in relationship* to the totality of old covenant life and experience. It is closely connected to the covenant, the covenant people, the tabernacle of the covenant, the services of the covenant, the laws of the



covenant, the promises of the covenant, the blessings of the covenant, the cursings of the covenant and the land of the covenant. The Sabbath “is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel for ever” (Ex. 31:17).

## Sabbath Observers

Who were commanded to observe the Sabbath?

But the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it *you* shall not do any work, you or *your son* or *your daughter*, *your male servant* or *your female servant* or *your cattle* or *your sojourner* who stays with you . . . (Ex. 20:10).

But during the seventh year the *land* shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard (Lev. 25:4).

Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor; in order that your *ox* and your *donkey* may rest, and the *son of your female slave*, as well as *your stranger*, may refresh themselves (Ex. 23:12).

The children of Israel, their cattle, their land and their sojourners were all required to keep the Sabbath.

## Purposes of the Sabbath

### A reminder of the seventh-day-creation rest

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and *rested on the seventh day*; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (Ex. 20:8,11).

### Physical rest

The root meaning of Sabbath is *rest*; and a primary purpose of the Sabbath was to provide rest. The first occurrence in Scripture of the word “Sabbath” occurs in connection with the giving of the manna. “So the people



*rested* on the seventh day” (Ex. 16:23,30). In the fourth commandment we read “You shall not do any work . . . for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and *rested* on the seventh day” (Ex. 20:10,11). In the section which explicitly states that the seventh-day Sabbath is the sign of the covenant between the Lord “and the sons of Israel” it says, “on the seventh day there is a sabbath of *complete rest*” (Ex. 31:15,17).

Exodus 23:12 specifies who were to be included in the Sabbath rest.

Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor; *in order* that your *ox* and your *donkey* may *rest*, and the son of your *female slave*, as well as your *stranger*, may *refresh themselves*.

Here it is expressly stated that the purpose of the Sabbath is to provide rest for the work animals and slaves.

The Sabbath rest also includes the land of Israel “During the seventh year the *land* shall have a sabbath *rest*” (Lev. 25:4). The same concept applies to the Jubilee (Lev. 25:11).

## A test of obedience

A careful examination of the first Sabbath incident reveals a third purpose of the Sabbath.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day that I may *test* them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. And it will come about on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily” (Ex. 16:4,5).

Here, the Sabbath functions *as a test of loyalty* for the covenant people. This is in harmony with the concept which is developed later in the book of Exodus, which



shows the Sabbath to be a sign of the covenant. So in the first occurrence of the Sabbath its purpose is stated as a “test” of Israel’s obedience. Later in this same account we read:

And it came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments, and My instructions?” (Ex. 16: 27,28).

In this account the Israelites disobeyed only one commandment (to remain in their place on the seventh day). Yet by their breaking that one commandment the Lord stated they refused to keep His “commandments” (plural), and His “instructions” (plural). Thus by breaking the Sabbath the Israelites were considered by God to have broken all the commandments and instructions He had given and would give them. This episode illustrates how the Sabbath serves as a sign or symbol of the whole covenant.

### **Sign of the covenant**

So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a *perpetual covenant*. It is a *sign* between *Me* and the *sons of Israel forever* (Ex. 31:16,17).

### **Sign of sanctification**

In Exodus 31:13 we read:

But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “You shall surely observe My sabbath; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who *sanctifies* you.”

Here the Sabbath is said to be a sign of sanctification. Some read back into this text a present-day theological definition of sanctification and interpret this text to say that the observance of the Sabbath is a sign that God



makes a person holy. God does make us holy, but we should interpret this passage using the basic meaning of sanctify, which is “to set apart.” In other words, the Sabbath is a sign that Israel was *set apart* or elected by God. For all practical purposes, this is just another way of saying that the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant. Israel was chosen or set apart by God.

### **A reminder of redemption from Egypt**

Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy . . . And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; *therefore* the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day (Deut. 5:12,15).

Here the purpose of the Sabbath is said to be a sign of Israel’s redemption from Egypt. In this version of the fourth commandment no mention is made of the seventh-day-creation rest. This purpose is also very closely related to the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant, for the redemption from Egypt was covenant redemption.

God remembered His covenant . . . So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians (Ex. 2:24; 3:8).

### **Chapter Summary**

1. The “Lord’s appointed times” were:
  - a. Seventh-day Sabbath
  - b. Passover
  - c. Feast of Unleavened Bread
  - d. Feast of First Fruits
  - e. Pentecost
  - f. Blowing of Trumpets
  - g. Day of Atonement
  - h. Feast of Booths
  - i. New moon celebrations

2. The seven yearly appointed times of the Lord were all “a sabbath to the Lord.”
3. *All* of the Sabbaths of Israel were said to be perpetual, everlasting, or “throughout your generations.”
4. Additional religious services closely connected with the Sabbath were:
  - a. Morning and evening burnt offerings
  - b. New moon festivals
5. When the “Lord’s appointed times” are listed they usually are listed in either ascending or descending order (days, months, seasons or seasons, months, days).
6. When the word “Sabbath” is listed with the yearly “sabbaths” or “appointed times of the Lord,” it *always* refers to the weekly Sabbath.
7. The sabbatical cycle consisted of:
  - a. Weekly, seventh-day Sabbaths
  - b. Seven seasonal sabbaths
  - c. Sabbatical years (every seventh year)
  - d. Jubilee (after the seventh sabbatical year)
8. The prohibitions for observing the Sabbaths were:
  - a. Not going out of one’s place
  - b. Not baking or boiling
  - c. Not doing any work
  - d. Not building a fire
  - e. Not buying or selling
  - f. Not carrying a load or burden
  - g. Not doing own pleasure
9. The commands for Sabbaths were:
  - a. Keep it holy
  - b. Complete rest
  - c. Observe, do, or celebrate
  - d. Delight in the Lord



10. Penalties for the violation of Sabbaths were:
  - a. Put to death
  - b. Cut off from the covenant people
11. Sabbaths were to be observed from evening until evening.
12. The seventh-day Sabbath was in the very center of, and was linked to, all old covenant relationships.
  - a. It is closely linked with the Sinaitic Covenant.
  - b. It is closely linked to the ark of the covenant.
  - c. It is closely linked to the tabernacle of the covenant.
  - d. It is closely linked to all covenant convocations.
  - e. It is closely linked to the sons of Israel.
  - f. It is closely linked to circumcision.
  - g. It is closely linked to the promised land.
  - h. It is closely linked with the blessings and cursings of the covenant.
13. Sabbath observers were to be:
  - a. You (implies both the Israelite husband and wife)
  - b. Your son
  - c. Your daughter
  - d. Your male servant
  - e. Your female servant
  - f. The son of your female slave
  - g. The sojourner (stranger) who stays with you
  - h. Your cattle
  - i. Your ox
  - j. Your donkey
  - k. Your land
14. Purposes for the Sabbath included:
  - a. A reminder of the seventh-day-creation rest
  - b. The physical rest of the Israelites, their slaves, and their sojourners

- c. The physical rest of Israel's cattle (ox and donkey)
  - d. A test to see if Israel would obey the Lord's commandments and laws
  - e. A sign of the covenant between the Lord and the "sons of Israel"
  - f. A sign of sanctification (covenant)
  - g. A sign of redemption from Egypt (covenant)
15. There seems to be a strong relationship between the Sabbath laws and the seventh-day-creation rest.
  16. The Sabbath concept seems to be a reminder of Eden before sin entered.
  17. Most, if not all, of the Sabbath prohibitions would have been meaningless to Adam and Eve before sin entered.
  18. Most, if not all, of the Sabbath commands would have been done naturally by Adam and Eve and thus would have been unneeded before sin.
  19. Israel's observance of the various Sabbath laws of the Sinaitic Covenant seems to be an acting out in a sinful world of what Adam and Eve did in a sinless world.
  20. While the Sabbath laws of the Sinaitic Covenant pointed back to the seventh-day rest in Eden and Israel's redemption from Egypt, there was also an element of hope for the future, especially in looking forward to the Jubilee.



## Chapter 5

# THE NEW COVENANT

### Introduction

This chapter will give a sweeping overview of the new covenant, determine how the New Testament defines the old covenant, and seek to find the proper relationship that exists between these two covenants. Several chapters later we will come back to this topic for further development.

The three main aspects of the old covenant were (1) the redemptive deliverance of Israel from Egypt, (2) the giving of the covenant at Sinai, and (3) the settlement of Israel in the land of Canaan. What are the main features of the new covenant?

When we come to the New Testament the dominant feature is *the life, death and resurrection of Christ*. Here we have a *new* saving activity, a *new* redemption, that is *greater* than that experienced by Israel in the exodus. As the saving activity of the exodus served as the foundation for Israel's law, service and worship, so for God's new covenant people the saving activity of Christ serves as the foundation for their law, the motivation for their service and the theme of their worship. To the degree that the new saving activity is better than the old, to that same degree the new law is better than the old, the new motivation for service is better than the old motivation, and the new theme of worship is better than the old.



## Christ, the basis of New Testament law

The redemption of Christ serves as the moral basis for New Testament law. While morality is clearly taught in the Old Testament, the New Testament writers seldom refer to Old Testament law as the *reason* for moral living, and when the law of the old covenant is mentioned in the epistles it is usually by way of illustration, rather than by way of command. In old covenant life morality was seen as an *obligation to numerous specific laws*. In the new covenant morality springs from *a response to the living Christ*. In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul admonishes Christians to stay away from prostitution and immorality. His reason for pure living is not based upon the laws of Sinai but upon the believer's relationship with Christ.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: *therefore* glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6: 15,19,20).

Paul could have referred to the old covenant laws which prohibited impure living, such as "You shall not commit adultery," and to portions of the Sinaitic Covenant which interpreted this law to apply to situations similar to the problems Paul was dealing with in Corinth.. There was plenty of material in the old covenant he could have used but he chose rather to use a better moral foundation: union with Christ.

In Philippians 2:1–4, Paul is seeking to guide the Christian believers to care for each other, to do nothing from selfishness or conceit. In the old covenant we find the reason to treat one another with loving care to be something like this:

He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and



shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, *for you were aliens in the land of Egypt* (Deut. 10:18,19).

In the new covenant the focus of morality is no longer Sinai or the exodus from Egypt. The new covenant has a *better* focus.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:5–8).

We will come back to the topic of new covenant law for further development in Chapter 13, nevertheless in this introductory chapter it is important to understand that new covenant law has its moral foundation in the spotless righteousness of Christ.

### **Christ, the motivation for holy living**

Under the new covenant the motivation for Christian living is centered in our love for Christ.

For the love of Christ controls us (2 Cor. 5:14). I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16). If you love me, you will keep my commandments (Jn. 14:15).

In his great masterpiece on salvation, the book of Romans, Paul first builds a solid foundation of man's acceptance by God based upon faith in the perfect, finished work of Christ. Then, and only then, does he admonish in holy living. His motivation for Christian living is based upon the work of Christ, not the laws of Sinai.

Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over

Him. For the death He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. *Therefore*, do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts . . . But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became *obedient from the heart* to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and *having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness* (Rom. 6:9–12, 18).

Justification by faith in Christ is a better motivation.

## **Overthrowing the strongholds of Satan**

As Old Testament history documents the covenant people overthrowing the Canaanites and settling themselves in the land of Canaan, so New Testament history records the acts of the apostles and the early Christians taking the “land” of the Gentile nations. In the old covenant God manifested His mighty works in overthrowing the walls of Jericho and driving out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. In the new covenant we see Christians filled with the power of the Holy Spirit overthrowing the strongholds of Satan, casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead and setting the captives free.

## **Christ, the theme of new covenant worship**

Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Heb. 13:15, 16).

When we come to understand that the One who died on the cross for our sins is KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:16), then we will join the millions who with a loud voice proclaim,

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power



and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever” (Rev. 5: 12–14).

When we understand and experience the new covenant gospel, when we realize that we who are sinners can stand without fault before the throne of God, when we experience the indwelling Christ, then we, too, will fall down and worship.

### Christ, a better revelation

Just as the old, slow, cumbersome, hand-operated calculator has been antiquated by the new, fast, compact, electronic computer, so the old covenant has been antiquated by the new. Not that the old was bad, for it was not. It was the best for its time, but now, new, *better* things have come.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son . . . and He is *the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature* (Heb. 1:1–3).

But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be *even more* with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, *much more* does the ministry of righteousness *abound in glory*. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, *much more* that which *remains is in glory* (2 Cor. 3:7–11).

The flickering candle of truth which lighted the



shadowy pathways of Old Testament history must give way to the unveiled glory of the *risen Son*!

### New Testament Definitions of Old Covenant

Before we seek to discover what the New Testament teaches regarding the relationship that should exist between the old and new covenants, we must first determine what the New Testament defines as the old covenant. It is clear and definitive.

In our study of the old covenant we found that the Ten Commandments were the covenant. They were called the “tablets of the testimony” (Ex. 31:18), the “words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Ex. 34:28), “the testimony” (Ex. 40:20), “the covenant of the Lord” (1 Ki. 8:8,9,21).

We also found that the other laws in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy were called the “book of the covenant” (Ex. 24:7) or “the book of the law” (Deut. 31:26). We saw that these laws served as an interpretation or expansion of the Ten Commandments. Does the New Testament agree with our findings?

Now even the *first covenant* had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. [The writer of Hebrews is now going to list things which were included in the “first covenant.”] For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the *ark of the covenant* covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and *the tables of the covenant* (Heb. 9:1–4).

The writer of Hebrews defines the “first covenant” as the Sinaitic Covenant and specifically mentions “the tables of the covenant” (the Ten Commandments).



In the following reference both aspects of the old covenant are mentioned.

You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with *ink*, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on *tablets of stone*, but on tablets of human hearts. And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a *new covenant, not of the letter*, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters *engraved on stones*, came with glory . . . (2 Cor. 3:2–7).

In these verses Paul is contrasting the new covenant with the old and in so doing defines the old covenant exactly as we found in our study of the Old Testament. The old covenant was not only on “tablets of stone” but “written with ink”—a reference to the “book of the covenant.” Both are included in Paul’s definition of old covenant.

In the book of Galatians Paul specifically mentions that the old covenant comes from Mt Sinai.

This contains an allegory; for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves (Gal. 4:24).

We see, then, that the New Testament confirms our conclusions regarding old covenant documents. The Sinaitic Covenant is called the “old” or the “first” covenant in the New Testament. The New Testament speaks of the “old” or “first” covenant as being “engraved on stone,” and calls it the “tablets of the covenant”; both are clear references to the Ten Commandments. The New Testament also includes “the book of the covenant” which was “written with ink,” in its definition of the old, or first, covenant.



## Old and New Covenant Relationships

Now that we have confirmed what the New Testament means when it refers to the old, or first, covenant, we must next address the proper relationship that should exist between these two covenants. Their relationship is very important and often highly controversial. From New Testament times to the present day this subject has been vigorously debated. There were Christians who followed Paul who said that unless a person kept all the laws of the old covenant, he could not be saved. Then, on the other extreme, there have been those like Marcion, a second-century Christian philosopher in Asia Minor, who felt the Christian church should not even include the Old Testament in its accepted canon of Scripture.

Some take a simplistic approach to the relationship which should exist between the new and old covenants: "I believe in the whole Bible. It doesn't really matter whether God says it in the New Testament or in the Old Testament; if He says it, it's good enough for me." In practice, however, even those who feel this way *must* pick and choose among the old covenant laws. What Christian today is willing to stone a person to death for a violation of Sabbath law? What married Christian man is willing to take his brother's wife and raise up children for a deceased brother? Yet both of these are old covenant laws (Ex. 31:14; Deut. 25:5–10).

In practice what usually happens is that in the process of entering into church fellowship we find a church where we feel "comfortable." We like the way the pastor "explains the Bible," or "teaches truth." When this takes place, consciously or unconsciously, we are often led to accept the "system of truth" which is taught. The church will, by applying its theological framework, choose to accept, and perhaps even enforce, certain of the Old Testament laws, while choosing to ignore certain others. Thus the church system, whatever that system is, becomes



the grid by which to filter out the Old Testament laws which “still apply,” while letting others fall into the hopper labeled, “not for today.” The problem here is that the “system of truth” is often taken for granted. The point I am making is that we, ourselves, ought to be conscious of what we are doing and seriously evaluate why certain old covenant laws are enforced and why certain others are discarded. We ought to find clear, scriptural guidelines to determine which Old Testament laws apply and which do not. Too often those who enforce old covenant laws do so on the basis of the old covenant statements themselves without letting the new covenant interpret, modify, or transform these laws with reference to Jesus Christ, the new covenant center.

Let us now carefully examine the New Testament evidence which compares and contrasts the old covenant with the new. In doing so our purpose is to discover principles of interpretation which will help us correctly understand which covenant is to have precedence and why.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is *the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature*, and upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:1–3).

#### **The Old Covenant:      The New Covenant:**

God spoke  
to the fathers  
long ago  
in the prophets  
in many portions,  
and in many ways.

God has spoken with finality  
to us  
in these last days  
in His Son  
Who is the radiance of His  
glory, the exact representation of  
His nature.



In the old covenant God did speak. He spoke to the fathers: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc. His revelation to them was fragmentary: a few direct statements and a few other revelations in summary and shadowy form. For example, the statement, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3), was not fully understood by the fathers. It would take hundreds, yes, thousands of years before the full meaning of that succinct statement would be fully understood.

The prophets often were at a loss to know the full intent of their own visions. For example, in the following quotation we see the prophet Daniel wondering what his vision meant.

Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain it . . . Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time (Dan. 8:27; 12:9).

The high point of God's revelation in the old covenant was the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. Yet even this fades into nothingness when compared with the revelation of the life of Jesus, who could say, "He who has seen Me, has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

The old covenant was given "to the fathers" "long ago," for the time then present. The new is given "to us" "in these last days." The old revelation of truth was incomplete, fragmentary: "God spoke." In the new revelation God speaks with finality: "God has spoken." Jesus is God's final word. Why? Because "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His [God's] nature."

The Hebrew Christians had been driven from their synagogues and the pageantry of the temple service. They were being persecuted; some had given up their lands and houses. Living the humble Christian life, meeting in



homes for Christian services did not compare outwardly to the safe, comfortable “good old days” when they were still practicing Judaism. Some were tempted to go back to the easy life of Judaism. So the writer of Hebrews shows these suffering Christians that the reality of their new life in Christ far supersedes that possible within the framework of the old covenant. The book of Hebrews was written to help Jewish Christians move away from the old covenant as a source of truth and as a guideline for worship. It does this by showing how much better the new covenant is over the old. A quick survey of this book shows the relationship between these two covenants.

### **Jesus: The New Covenant**

- Is a better revelation of truth (Heb. 1:1–3)
- Is better than the angels (Heb. 1:3–14)
- Is worthy of more glory than Moses (Heb. 3:1–3)
- Gives a better hope (Heb. 6:9–11)
- Has a better guarantee in Christ (Heb. 7:22)
- Has a more excellent ministry (Heb. 8:6)
- Has a better mediator in Christ (Heb. 8:6)
- Is enacted on better promises (Heb. 8:6)
- Cleansed with better sacrifices (Heb. 9:23)
- Promises a better country (Heb. 11:16)
- Promises a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35)
- Gives us something better (Heb. 11:40)
- Speaks with better blood (Heb. 12:24)

We must remember that the writer of Hebrews was writing to a people who loved the old covenant services. While his writing is to the point and at times very strong, he nevertheless couched his words so he would not offend his intended readers. Therefore, he chooses to use the often-repeated word “better” to describe the difference between the two covenants. However, when we turn to comparisons of the two covenants in documents which



were written to Gentile audiences we find even *stronger* language used.

Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory (2 Cor. 3:6–11).

### Old Covenant:

(inadequate implied)  
of the letter  
letter kills  
ministry of death  
came with glory  
ministry of condemnation  
glory fades  
now has no glory

### New Covenant:

adequate servants  
of the Spirit  
Spirit gives life  
ministry of the Spirit  
abounds in glory  
ministry of righteousness  
glory surpasses it  
remains in glory

In the next few verses, Paul comes to more practical matters. What about reading the old covenant?

But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart. But whenever a man turns to the Lord, that veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as the from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:12–18).



What is Paul saying here? First, the people with the veil over their faces are those who accept the old covenant as it reads or read it through old covenant eyes (in his case the Jews). Paul is saying that to understand the old covenant correctly we must see it from the new covenant perspective. This is a very important principle of interpretation. *The new covenant, which is a better and more nearly complete revelation of truth, must be allowed to interpret, modify or transform old covenant statements in a Christ-centered way.* see Luke 16:17, 31

Second, if we continue to read the old covenant from any other perspective it will be as though we are looking through a veil and we could come to the wrong conclusions. This means that *we should not accept any old covenant laws or practices on the basis of the old covenant statements themselves. Rather, we must examine every old covenant law and statement from the new covenant perspective: Jesus Christ.*

Applying this principle to the topic of the Sabbath means that as Christians we are not to go directly to old covenant laws and statements regarding Sabbath observance. Rather, we are to see these laws from a Christ-centered perspective and let the new covenant interpret, modify or transform all old covenant Sabbath law.

Before we leave the discussion of Paul's comparison of the two covenants, I would like to point out his frequent mention of the Holy Spirit in connection with the new covenant. We will deal more fully with this concept a few chapters later, but for now keep your eyes and hearts open for insights regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant. The Holy Spirit is vitally important to a correct understanding and application of new covenant law!

With this overview of the new covenant we are prepared to study the topic of the Sabbath within the New



Testament record. In our next chapter we will begin to study the Sabbath in the life and teaching of Jesus.

### Chapter Summary

1. The new covenant centers around the life, death and resurrection of Christ.
2. The redemption from sin brought by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus serves as the moral foundation for new covenant law, the motivation for Christian living and the theme of Christian worship.
3. The new covenant calls the Sinaitic Covenant the “old covenant” or the “first covenant.”
4. The new covenant defines the old covenant as both the Ten Commandments and the other laws which made up the old covenant.
5. The new covenant is much better than the old in every way.
6. The new covenant has greater authority than the old covenant.
7. Unless the old covenant is interpreted by the new and read in a Christ-centered way, the reader will not understand it correctly.



## Chapter 6

# JUBILEE SABBATH

### Introduction

As we study the life of Jesus in the four Gospels we should keep four concepts well in mind.

#### **Transition between the covenants**

First, the Gospels record the historical time period between the old and new covenants. Sometime between the baptism of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost the transition between the old covenant and the new covenant was fully made.

#### **Transition: a process with a point in time**

Second, the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant is made in stages. Certain aspects of the new covenant seem to come into play before others. We should expect this, as the giving of the old covenant to the sons of Israel was done in increments starting at the exodus from Egypt and continuing to just before they entered into the land of Canaan. Within that forty-year period, however, the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai and the events connected with it are usually seen to be the starting point of the old covenant. In the same way we will find the new covenant comes in stages over a

three-and-a-half-year period with the resurrection of Christ as the key point of the transition.

### **The example of Jesus is limited**

Third, we should not be surprised to find Jesus observing and even teaching about old covenant convocations. We know that He was “born under law” (Gal. 4:4). We know that he was circumcised according to the direction of the law (Lk. 2:21). He observed the Passover on more than one occasion (Lk. 2:41,42; Jn. 2:13, Jn. 5:1; Lk. 22:11), as well as other old covenant convocations (Jn. 7:2,10; 10:22). Even Jesus’ teaching includes demands that the people hallow the temple (Mk. 11:15–18) and present old covenant sacrifices (Mt. 5:23,24). We cannot use Christ’s example in Sabbath observance to enforce present-day Sabbath keeping unless we are also willing to use His example to enforce circumcision, the Passover, temple worship and the other old covenant practices.

### **The Gospels are history and theology**

Fourth, while the Gospels are historical accounts of the life of Jesus, they are more than history. They are theological works as well. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Gospel writers selected and recorded certain events from the life of Jesus for theological reasons. While they all did this, John is the most forthright in stating this fact.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name (Jn. 20:30,31).

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even



the world itself would not contain the books which were written (Jn. 21:25).

Therefore, we ought to look for the theological reasons for the inclusion of certain incidents and historical details in the life of Jesus. Also, we should thoughtfully observe the exact wording and what may appear as miscellaneous factual detail. Sometimes in these facts we may find hints of truth which the casual reader would miss. As the Gospels were written many years after the resurrection, the writers may have chosen to include certain Sabbath incidents which would, by their inclusion, speak to the theological needs of that time.

### Method of study

In this study of the life and ministry of Jesus as it relates to the Sabbath we will seek to discover what He *taught* regarding the Sabbath, and what Jesus *did* on Sabbath days. We will examine both the immediate and wider context.

### Jubilee Fulfilled

(Lk. 4:16–30; Mk. 6:1–6; Mt. 13:53–58)

This chapter starts out, “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Lk. 4:1). While in the wilderness Jesus was tempted (tested) by the devil for forty days. After successfully withstanding Satan’s temptations “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit” (Lk. 4:14).

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to



preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” And He closed the book, and give it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:16–21).

Picture yourself in the synagogue at Nazareth as Jesus reads this portion of Old Testament Scripture, which all recognize as a prophecy of the Messiah proclaiming the Jubilee, the favorable year of the Lord. Watch as Jesus takes His seat, which was the approved place for a teacher to give further comments on the reading. Then listen to Jesus say, “*Today* this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!”

The first sermon of Jesus consisted of three points: (1) He was the Messiah, (2) the Jubilee had come, and (3) His mission was one of liberation, of setting the captives free! Let us consider each point.

of Sabbath?

## Jesus, the promised Messiah

We immediately note that Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1, a Messianic prophecy couched in Jubilee language and a phrase from Isaiah 42:7 “To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from the prison.” The context of this second passage must not escape our attention. This is a prophecy of the coming Messiah, set forth in the terms of “My Servant” with overtones of the Jubilee.

Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put *My Spirit* upon him; He will bring *justice* to the *nations* . . . I am the Lord, I have called you [the Messiah] in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and *I will appoint you as a covenant to the people*, as a light to the *nations*. To open blind eyes, *to bring out* prisoners from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from



the prison . . . Behold, the *former things* have come to pass, now I declare *new things*. Sing to the Lord a *new song*. (Isa. 42:1,6,7,9,10).

Here we see several things of major importance to our study that relate to this “Servant,” the Messiah.

### **Descriptions of the nature and work of the Messiah:**

1. He is God’s Chosen (elect) One (v. 1)
2. He has the Spirit of God upon Him (v. 1)
3. His ministry brings justice to the nations (plural) (v. 1)
4. He is a covenant to the people (v. 6)
5. His work is to free those living in bondage (v. 7)
6. He declares “new things” (v. 9)

This ministry cannot fit within the framework of the old covenant. The Messiah is now the elect One. Through the long centuries from the day when God told Abraham, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” God had slowly been narrowing His elect. “For through Isaac your descendants shall be named” (Gen. 21:12). It is narrowed further as Esau is rejected and the covenant is through Jacob (Gen. 27,28). Years later the covenant promise of rulership is narrowed to the house of David (2 Chron. 13:5). Then it is limited even further to One who was to be born in Bethlehem (Mich. 5:2). The prophecy quoted above says that God would have an elect “*One*.” We can sense the excitement of the disciples as they announced, “We have found the Messiah” (Jn. 1:41)! Jesus was that One. Then, as this One perfectly fulfills God’s will and makes reconciliation for the sins of the world, from this Elect One flows a joyful proclamation of blessing and forgiveness to all nations.

The ministry of the Messiah was to be a Spirit-filled ministry. Thus we read of Jesus, “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan . . . And Jesus



returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit” (Lk. 4:1,14).

No longer is the covenant limited to the “sons of Israel throughout their generations,” but Jesus is to bring justice to the nations.

But He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the *other cities* also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Lk. 4:43).

For forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the *nations* (Lk. 24:47).

No longer is the covenant the words engraved on two tablets of stone; *Jesus is the covenant. He, Himself, is “a covenant to the people”* (Isa. 42:6).

The ministry of this Servant is a liberating ministry. We see Jesus releasing the demonized (Lk. 4:31–36), rebuking fever (Lk. 4:38,39), healing various diseases (Lk. 4:40) and preaching the gospel to the oppressed poor (Lk. 7:22).

The coming of the Messiah is a new revelation.

And amazement came upon them all, and they began discussing with one another, and saying, “What is the message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out” (Lk. 4:36).

The passage in Luke 4:16–30 and the Old Testament scriptures quoted by Jesus in these verses openly teach that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

## Jesus, the fulfillment of Jubilee

The context of Isaiah 42 fits perfectly within the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1,2. Both have strong overtones of Jubilee. As we review the queen of the Sabbaths, the Jubilee, we find the following facts:

### The Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–17)

1. Started on the Day of Atonement (v. 9).

2. Was ushered in with the blowing of a ram's horn (v. 9).
3. Was a proclamation of release to all inhabitants of the land (v. 10).
4. Made provision for each to return to his own family and property (v. 10).
5. Allowed for no sowing or reaping (v. 11).
6. Instructed the people to eat the crops out of the field (v. 12).
7. Brought justice to all (vv. 14–17).

The heart of the Jubilee was the proclamation of *release* to all the inhabitants of the land. The word “release” as used in Luke 4:18 is the same word that the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament used in translating the Jubilee Scripture in Lev. 25:10. However, the New Testament expands the meaning of this word to include not only release, but also forgiveness of sin.<sup>1</sup>

As we look at the ministry of Jesus, we immediately see Him proclaiming both release and forgiveness. “Woman, you are *freed* from your sickness . . . Should not this woman have been *released* from this bond on the Sabbath day” (Lk. 13:10–17)? “My son, your *sins are forgiven*” (Mk. 2:5).

Scripture stated that at the coming of the Jubilee each person was to return to his own family and the land of his fathers. Therefore, it is no accident that Luke records the coming of Jesus to Nazareth in these words: “And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up” (Lk. 4:16). There, in His home town, with His family present, Jesus announced that Jubilee had arrived.

While the Day of Atonement is not mentioned by name in the New Testament, the book of Hebrews shows how this old covenant sabbath pointed forward to the atonement brought by Christ's death on the cross. In the old covenant the Day of Atonement had to be repeated every year. By contrast Jesus,



having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God . . . For by *one offering* He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb. 10: 1-4, 12, 14).

Jesus not only fulfilled the Day of Atonement, but the atonement He brought far superseded the old covenant concept of the Day of Atonement. The seasonal sabbath of the Day of Atonement served as a pointer to direct the people to the death of Christ. But when that “one offering” was sacrificed, the function of the yearly Day of Atonement ceased to exist in the presence of the true atonement for sin: Jesus Christ.

The Jubilee was ushered in by the blowing of a ram's horn. It was a way of proclaiming the good news of freedom, rest, and release to the captives. With the coming of Jesus, the fulfillment of the Jubilee, we see a proclamation of even better news than the old covenant Jubilee.

I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:10,11). And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit; and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district (Lk. 4:14).

Later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Luke records:

And He [Jesus] said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be *proclaimed* in His name to all the nations” (Lk. 24:46,47).

The proclamation of the Jubilee pointed forward to the proclamation of the gospel. During the Jubilee there was to be no sowing or reaping; people were to eat the crops out of the field. Correspondingly we read of Jesus

And at that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the



grainfields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat (Mt. 12:1).

Jesus ushered in and fulfilled the Jubilee. The Jubilee was a shadow of a greater rest, a greater release, a greater proclamation. The Gospels teach that Jesus “fulfilled” that to which the Jubilee pointed. As the Messiah, He proclaimed the favorable year of the Lord—the kingdom rule of Christ.

### **The Jubilee ministry of Jesus**

Cast out an unclean demon	Lk. 4:31–36
Rebuked fever and it left	Lk. 4:38,39
Healed sick with various diseases	Lk. 4:40
Cast out many demons	Lk. 4:41
Preached the kingdom of God	Lk. 4:43,44
Forgave sin	Lk. 5:20
Opened the eyes of the blind	Lk. 7:21
Released a woman bound by Satan	Lk. 13:10–17

Not only did Jesus announce that Jubilee had arrived, but His ministry testified to that truth.

### **Sabbath Behavior of Jesus**

In the foregoing section we studied the Sabbath teaching of Jesus. In this short section we will see what we can learn from His Sabbath behavior.

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read (Lk 4:16).

As a good Jew, it was the habit, or custom, of Jesus to attend Sabbath services in the synagogue. This is reinforced several times in this chapter.

And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on Sabbath days (Lk. 4:31).



### Summary of Luke 4:16–30

1. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus.
2. Jesus was anointed (as Messiah) by the Spirit to:
  - a. Preach the gospel to the poor
  - b. Proclaim release (and forgiveness) to the captives
  - c. Proclaim recovery of sight to the blind
  - d. Proclaim freedom to the downtrodden
  - e. Proclaim the favorable year of the Lord (Jubilee)
3. The ministry as set forth in the whole of Luke 4 was a ministry of liberation which included:
  - a. Freeing the demonized
  - b. Rebuking fever
  - c. Healing the sick
  - d. Proclaiming the kingdom of God
4. In this passage nothing is *taught* regarding the Sabbath.
5. Jesus declared that:
  - a. He was God's chosen (elect) One
  - b. He had the Spirit of God upon Him
  - c. His ministry was to bring justice to the nations
  - d. He was a covenant to the people
  - e. His work was to free those living in bondage
  - f. His coming was a new revelation
6. Sabbath behavior of Jesus:
  - a. It was the custom of Jesus to attend the synagogue services on the Sabbath.
  - b. On this occasion Jesus participated in the synagogue service by reading and commenting upon the Scripture read.

### Jubilee Experienced

(Luke 13:10–17)

Luke is the only Gospel writer to record this Sabbath healing. Since this incident falls within the scope of

Jesus' Jubilee ministry I have included it with this chapter.

And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, and behold, there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. And when Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." And He laid His hands upon her; and immediately she was made erect again, and began glorifying God." And the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the multitude in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; therefore come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" And as He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him (Lk. 13:10–17).

It appears that Jesus considered the Sabbath not only as an appropriate day upon which to heal, but a most desirable day for this activity. He took the initiative to call this bent-over woman to Himself as soon as He saw her. It should be recognized that her illness was not life threatening, because she had already been in this condition for eighteen years. Jesus obviously could have waited until the Sabbath was over to minister to her, but He chose to heal her in the synagogue in the presence of the multitude with Jewish leaders closely observing His actions.

Luke states that her condition was "caused by a spirit" (Lk. 13:11). In harmony with this, Jesus says that Satan had bound her for the duration of her illness. The fact that Jesus calls her "a daughter of Abraham" indicates that



she was a believing Israelite, a member of the covenant community.

The actions of Jesus must be seen as spiritual warfare. Satan had made inroads upon God's true child. He had "bound" this daughter of Abraham for eighteen long years. In the presence of Jesus, however, Satan's kingdom is driven back, the woman is "released" from her bondage, and this captive is set free. This is Jubilee ministry; it is a demonstration of the kingdom rule of God. How fitting that Jesus should overthrow the power of Satan on the Sabbath, a day which was a reminder of the deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Deut. 5:15) and restore this woman to the "rest" which existed before Satan had overcome Eve, the first daughter of God.

Isaiah prophesied that when the Messiah would come a new song of praise would be sung (Isa. 42:10). As soon as this woman was made erect by the touch of Jesus she "began glorifying God" (Lk. 13:13). This praise was not something required by the law. It was the natural response of the woman's heart which overflowed in gratitude to God for her "release" from the power of Satan. This woman, who had been bound as a captive of Satan, was called by Jesus into personal fellowship, delivered from the power of her oppressor and healed from her physical condition. She *experienced* the true rest of Sabbath Jubilee! She now had a new motive for service. She was experiencing new covenant life.

The Jewish leaders, on the other hand, were "enslaved" under the letter of the old covenant Sabbath law and could not experience the "release of the new covenant nor could they rejoice with the woman in her healing.

Jesus defended His Sabbath conduct of "releasing" this woman by referring to the Sabbath behavior of the Jewish leaders who would "untie" their ox or donkey on the Sabbath and lead it to water. In doing so the opponents



of Jesus were humiliated and the multitude rejoiced over what Jesus was doing.

### **Summary of Luke 13:10–17**

1. The woman healed was not in a life-threatening condition.
2. Jesus, upon seeing this woman, immediately called her to Himself.
3. This woman's physical condition was caused by a spirit.
4. Jesus spoke freedom to this woman and then, after laying His hands upon her, released her from the power of Satan.
5. After being healed this woman immediately began praising God.
6. The synagogue official considered the actions of Jesus as a violation of Sabbath law.
7. Jesus defended His Sabbath conduct on the basis of the Sabbath behavior of the Jewish leaders. If Sabbath law allowed the Jewish leaders to untie and water their animals on the Sabbath, in the same way Sabbath law must allow for a true child of God to be "released" from the power of Satan on the Sabbath.
8. The underlying theme of this Sabbath healing is one of release from the power of Satan and freedom in the presence of Christ—themes found in the Jubilee and the Sabbath.
9. It appears that Jesus considered this Jubilee-type ministry to be especially appropriate on the seventh-day Sabbath.
10. While seeking to enforce the letter of Sabbath law, the Jewish leaders completely missed the experience to which these laws pointed: freedom from the power of Satan and fellowship with God.



**Note**

<sup>1</sup> Kittle, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. I, p. 510.

## Chapter 7

### THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

In this chapter we will examine two occurrences in the ministry of Jesus where He clearly exerts His authority over old covenant Sabbath law.

#### Authority over the Demonized

(Mark 1:21–34; Luke 4:31–44)

These passages describe three Sabbath events: (1) a Sabbath morning synagogue encounter with a demonized man, (2) the Sabbath afternoon healing of Simon's mother-in-law, and (3) the "after sundown" ministry to the multitudes.

And they [Jesus and some of His disciples] went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. And they were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice, and came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." And immediately the news about Him



went out everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee (Mk. 1:21–28).

While this portion of Scripture speaks of Jesus' teaching method, nothing is said about the content of His teaching. The people were amazed at His teaching authority—"He was teaching them as one having authority" (v.22)—and His doing authority—"He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him" (v.27). However we have no record of what He taught, only what He did.

Note that the unclean spirit recognized Jesus. The spirit knew Jesus was from Nazareth and that He was "The Holy One of God." It can be inferred that the unclean spirit knew what the outcome was to be. "Have you come to destroy us?" Jesus' answer in essence was "Yes!" Jesus demonstrated the "gospel of the kingdom"—the rule and reign of God over the forces of evil.

The weekly Sabbath was to be a day of rest. The Jubilee was to be a day of freeing the captives. How appropriate that Jesus takes both concepts and on the Sabbath frees the captive of Satan, thus giving the person "rest" from enemy enslavement.

After the synagogue meeting Jesus and the disciples go to the home of Simon and Andrew.

And immediately after they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Him about her. And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she began to wait on them (Mk. 1:29–31).

Again, nothing is expressly taught about the Sabbath in this incident but much can be concluded from Christ's activities. The disciples, who had recently been called by Jesus, seemed to understand that His ministry was a healing ministry, for they immediately told Him about the sickness of Peter's mother-in-law, indicating they expected



Jesus to heal her. By healing her during the hours of the Sabbath Jesus made it clear He considered healing an acceptable, or even desirable, Sabbath activity.

In Luke's account Jesus "rebukes" the fever (Lk. 4:39) as if He were speaking to an intelligent entity. It can be inferred that the fever was probably caused by some malevolent spirit which Jesus rebuked.

After this spirit left Peter's mother-in-law she immediately began to "wait" on them. Word of this healing must have spread immediately to the surrounding communities for a few hours later,

When evening had come, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city had gathered at the door. And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was (Mk. 1:32-34).

Scripture does not say why the people waited until after the Sabbath to bring their sick to Jesus. The fact that Jesus felt free to heal Simon's mother-in-law on the Sabbath indicates that it was not so much His desire that the people wait until after sundown to come for healing as it was their own ideas regarding Sabbath observance.

Jesus was continually performing a liberating, freeing ministry, healing those sick with various diseases and casting out demons. Both Mark and Luke indicate Jesus continued this type of ministry on other Sabbaths.

And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons (Mk. 1:39).

And He was teaching them on Sabbath days (Lk. 4:31).

Note how Jesus describes His liberating and healing activities in Luke 4:43,44.

But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this



purpose.” And He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Jesus defines the “kingdom of God” as His liberating, jubilee ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons, a ministry which demonstrated His authority or kingdom rule over the forces of evil.

### **Summary of Mark 1:21–34 and Luke 4:31–44**

In summary, nothing in this incident is expressly taught regarding the Sabbath. However, from the activity of Jesus we learn the following:

1. Jesus’ Sabbath teaching was with such authority it amazed His hearers.
2. Jesus commanded an unclean spirit to come out of a demonized person on the Sabbath. It obeyed.
3. Jesus felt free to heal (by rebuking a fever) on the Sabbath.
4. Simon’s mother-in-law, who had just been healed, waited on them while it was Sabbath.
5. Just after sundown, which marked the end of the Sabbath, Jesus healed many people with various diseases and cast out many demons.
6. Jesus continued His liberating ministry on other Sabbath days in the synagogues of Galilee and Judea.
7. Jesus called His ministry of healing and of casting out demons “preaching the kingdom of God.”

### **Authority over Sabbath Law**

(Mk. 2:23–28; Mt. 12:1–8; Lk. 6:1–5)

This is a very important Sabbath encounter, recorded by all the Synoptic Gospels. Some add additional details and some have contextual material which must be studied in connection with it. The thrust of this incident bears directly on the topic of Sabbath behavior, therefore we



must give the most careful attention to this passage. We will first examine the reference from Mark and then consider the additional material found in Matthew. Luke adds no additional detail.

The Mark account comes *immediately after* Jesus' discussion about putting new wine into old wineskins. Most interpret this section to refer to the contrast between Judaism and Christianity or the old and new covenants. In essence, Jesus was saying by this illustration that the fullness of the new covenant gospel could not be put into the rigid forms of Judaism. The gospel of Christ must be placed in a new "wineskin"—the church.

And it came about that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to Him, "See here, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and became hungry, he and his companions: How he entered into the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he gave it also to those who were with him?" And He was saying to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:23–28).

Matthew's account of this Sabbath occurrence follows *immediately after* Christ made this proclamation:

Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find *rest* for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light (Mt. 11:28–30).

In the Matthew account we also find that Christ's defense of His disciples' activities has two additional arguments not listed in Mark.

Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath



the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, "I desire compassion, and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the innocent (Mt. 12:5–7).

First, let us look carefully at what the disciples were doing and why the Pharisees considered them to be breaking the Sabbath. It is very easy for us to denounce the Pharisees for their narrow interpretation of Sabbath law. Yet to rightly understand this incident and what Jesus was really teaching we must see it from their perspective. In this case the Pharisees understood the Sabbath law to require "complete rest" (Ex. 31:15) and refraining from all work (Ex. 20:10). The Pharisees recognized that these laws applied even to plowing and harvest time (Ex. 34:21). They were familiar with the instruction which said that on the Sabbath they were "to remain every man in his place" (Ex. 16:29). Further, they knew the Scripture which taught that food was to be gathered and prepared on the day before the Sabbath so no gathering or cooking would interfere with the rest of the Sabbath day (Ex. 16:23–26).

Looking through the eyes of the Pharisees we can see why they considered Christ's disciples to be breaking the Sabbath on at least three counts: (1) They were "harvesting and threshing" the grain in their hands, which was work and therefore a violation of the Sabbath. (2) They were not completely resting, which was required on the Sabbath. (3) They had failed to "remember the Sabbath" in that they apparently had not prepared their food the day before.

Whether or not the disciples actually broke the letter of the biblical Sabbath law is not the point. Rather, Jesus took authority over Sabbath law and defended His disciples by giving four powerful arguments to show that His disciples did not come under condemnation for their actions. Consider each of the arguments Christ put



forward to show why His disciples were free from condemnation.

Argument one is:

Have you never read what David did when he was in need and became hungry, he and his companions: How he entered into the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, *which is not lawful* for anyone to eat except the priests, and he gave it also to those were with him (Mk. 2:25,26)?

In 1 Samuel 21:1–6 we are told that David was fleeing from King Saul, who was seeking to kill him. He came to the priest and in answer to the priest's question as to why David was alone he answered,

The king has commissioned me with a matter, and has said to me, "Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you with which I have commissioned you and I have directed the young men to a certain place."

This was a lie. Nevertheless the priest believed it and gave David "consecrated bread" which he later shared with his men.

There are two possible conclusions which may be drawn from this illustration, both of which are correct. First, human need takes precedence over the letter of the law. Second, David was exempted from the law because of who he was: the anointed of God, the coming King of Israel. It was all right for *His* men to eat this bread because they were *associated* with the coming King of Israel, who was above the letter of the law by virtue of his kingly office.

Correspondingly Jesus was arguing that His disciples were innocent, not so much because they were hungry, but because they were involved with Him in His work, which took precedence over Sabbath law. Jesus was the anointed of God, the coming King of Israel; therefore, they were free from condemnation by virtue of their association with Christ. This offers a preview of the coming redemption of



new covenant gospel: you are complete in Him. The second argument Christ placed before the Pharisees to justify His disciples' questionable Sabbath activity is this:

Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple *break* the Sabbath, and are innocent (Mt. 12:5)?

The priests are instructed in the law to do certain things on the Sabbath which would fall into the category of work and would normally be considered Sabbath breaking. These activities were probably the making and deploying of fresh showbread (Lev. 24:5–9) and the sacrificing of certain Sabbath offerings (Num. 28:9,10). However, because these activities were associated with the old covenant services the priests were innocent. Most pastors can relate to this argument. The day of worship is often, if not always, the hardest and most tiring day of their week.

Now notice how Christ applies this argument to the situation at hand. “But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here” (Mt. 12:6). Jesus used this phrase several other times in this chapter and it becomes evident what He means.

The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, *something greater* than Jonah is here (Mt. 12:41).

The Queen of the South shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it; because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, *something greater* than Solomon is here (Mt. 12:42).

That “something greater” is Jesus Himself and the kingdom He brings. It was God’s presence which made the tabernacle service important enough to allow the priests to violate the letter of the Sabbath law and yet be innocent. The presence of Jesus tabernacling (Jn. 1:14)



in the temple of His body (Mt. 26:61) took precedence over Sabbath law. Therefore, just as the priests could violate the *letter* of the Sabbath law to fulfill the more important services of the temple, so the disciples of Jesus can violate the letter of (a narrow interpretation of) the Sabbath law because they were engaged in the more important service of One who is greater than the temple.

The third argument of Jesus is:

But if you had known what this means, "I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice," you would not have condemned the innocent (Mt. 12:7).

This is a quotation from Hosea 6:6. It reads,

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

This text cuts to the very heart and meaning of covenant law. It shows that God is more concerned with attitude than He is with ritual, even ritual which pointed forward to Christ's death on the cross. In this argument, Jesus proves the disciples are innocent because of their heart loyalty and close association to Him, even though they *may* have broken the *letter* of Sabbath law.

Here again is the irony of the old covenant Sabbath laws as observed by the Pharisees. On one hand the Pharisees, who were keeping the very letter of the Sabbath laws, had no compassion or loyalty to the God of the covenant. On the other hand the disciples, who *may* have broken the *letter* of the old covenant Sabbath law, were loyally following their Lord!

The fourth argument of Jesus is:

The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27,28).

The meaning of this verse has been vigorously debated. Some have argued it teaches that the Sabbath was instituted *at creation* for all mankind.<sup>1</sup> However, this



interpretation runs completely contrary to the Jewish understanding that the Sabbath was given *only* to the nation of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

Here Jesus is saying that the Sabbath was made for the *benefit* of man and not man for the *benefit* of the Sabbath. Because of this, Jesus, as the Son of Man, controls the Sabbath and is not to be controlled by it.<sup>3</sup> The term, *the Son of Man*, which Jesus used in reference to himself, comes from Daniel 7:13, where it is used in connection with the dawning of the eschatological (end time) reign of God. Thus, in defense of Jesus' disciples' questionable Sabbath activities, Jesus announces His own authority as the Son of Man who is bringing the eschatological reign of God.

The thrust of Jesus' argument is not in defining appropriate Sabbath behavior or a correct interpretation of old covenant Sabbath law; rather it is in showing how old covenant law, including Sabbath law, points to *Him*.

In summary, we see that Jesus is taking authority over Sabbath law. His presence allows greater freedom regarding Sabbath observance than the priests had in the temple. His *office* as the Anointed, coming King of Israel, gave Him and those associated with Him freedom to infringe upon (a narrow interpretation of) Sabbath law. As the Son of Man, who has the *mission* of bringing in the eschatological reign of God, He is above the control of Sabbath law.

We can safely conclude even more than this. When we consider that in both Mark and Luke this incident *immediately* follows the discussion about putting new wine in new wineskins we get overtones of coming changes. Remembering also that in Matthew this incident (Mt. 12:1,2) is connected to the three verses of the preceding chapter (Mt. 11:28–30) by the use of the phrase “at this time” (Mt. 12:1), leads us to conclude that the



Sabbath itself may be associated with the eschatological rest of God.

At the same time, there is evidence for the fact that the Sabbath itself is associated with the theme of restoration and the messianic age. Within such a framework the fact that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath becomes the more significant, for the very concept of Sabbath begins to undergo transformation. That Jesus Christ is Lord of the Sabbath is not only a messianic claim of grand proportions, but it raises the possibility of a future change or reinterpretation of the Sabbath, in precisely the same way that His professed superiority over the Temple raises certain possibilities about ritual law. No details of that nature are spelled out here, but the verse arouses expectations.<sup>4</sup>

### **Summary of the Sabbath in a Grainfield**

1. The disciples *may* have violated the *letter* of old covenant law.
2. In proving His disciples “innocent,” Jesus presented four powerful arguments, all of which show *His* authority over Sabbath law.
  - a. David and his men violated the letter of the law by eating the consecrated bread. It is implied that David was innocent because of who he was: the anointed of God, the coming King of Israel. It is implied that his men were innocent because they were with David. Correspondingly, Jesus, by virtue of His kingly office, is above the letter of the law, and His disciples are innocent because they are with the Anointed of God, the coming King of Israel.
  - b. The priests are innocent of breaking the Sabbath because their Sabbath “work” was necessary to the temple service. But “Something” greater than the temple was there with the disciples in the grainfield that Sabbath day. That “Something” was none other than God, who was

“tabernacling” in the flesh—the temple of His body. Correspondingly, the disciples are innocent because they are in the service of Jesus, Someone greater than the old temple.

- c. God desired real, heartfelt compassion and loyalty over the ritual of sacrifice. Thus, the disciples were innocent of their violation of ritual law because by following Jesus they demonstrated their heartfelt compassion and loyalty to Him, which took precedence over the letter of the law.
  - d. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently the Son of Man is Lord (has authority) over the Sabbath.
3. The thrust of Jesus’ argument is not so much in defining appropriate Sabbath conduct as in showing how old covenant law points to Him.
  4. When taken as a whole and considering the context, Jesus’ response to the Pharisees lays the groundwork for the possibility of future changes.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Desmond Ford, *The Forgotten Day*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Harold H. P. Dressler, *The Sabbath in the Old Testament*, in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, p. 34. C. Rowland, *A summary of Sabbath Observance in Judaism at the Beginning of the Christian Era*, in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, p. 46. Max M. B. Turner, *The Sabbath, Sunday and the Law in Luke/Acts*, in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels*, in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.



## Chapter 8

### SABBATH CONFLICTS

#### A Sabbath in a Synagogue

(Lk. 6:6–11; Mt. 12:9–14; Mk. 3:1–6)

In all the synoptic gospels, this Sabbath episode follows the one we have just studied in the previous chapter. Each account varies somewhat from the others, but the thrust of the teaching is the same in all three. I will quote the account as found in Luke and then add the additional material found in Matthew and Mark.

And it came about on another Sabbath, that He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees were watching Him closely, to see if He healed on the Sabbath, in order that they might find reason to accuse Him. But He knew what they were thinking and He said to the man with the withered hand, “Arise and come forward!” And he arose and came forward. And Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil, to save a life, or to destroy it?” And after looking around at them all, He said to him, “Stretch out your hand!” And he did so; and his hand was completely restored. But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus (Lk. 6:6–11).

Matthew states that the Pharisees were questioning Jesus instead of Jesus questioning them (Mt. 12:10); Luke records that Jesus, “knowing their thoughts,” questioned the Pharisees. This is not a contradiction, as the Pharisees



could have been questioning Jesus in their thoughts. Matthew also records the reasoning of Jesus.

What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:11,12).

Mark's account adds more detail regarding Jesus' reaction to the people in the synagogue and the anger He felt toward their hardness of heart.

And after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand" (Mk. 3:5).

This story deals specifically with Sabbath behavior. The Jewish rabbis had interpreted healing, caring for the sick, as work and therefore a violation of Sabbath law. However, they had modified this so that one could care for those who were in a life-threatening situation.<sup>1</sup> However, it is obvious that the man with a withered hand was *not* in a life-threatening condition. This incident appears to be a direct confrontation by Jesus upon the commonly accepted interpretation of Sabbath law though not a violation of Old Testament Sabbath law itself.

Jesus showed His attitude by "looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart." Then he demonstrated His authority to interpret the Sabbath law by openly calling the man to the front and healing him.

Jesus asks the question, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?" Then He follows up His own question with action and heals the man. The result of this open confrontation with the accepted interpretation of Sabbath law was that the Pharisees immediately counseled with the Herodians and set out to "destroy Him."

In the last chapter, when the disciples of Jesus were accused of Sabbath violation, Jesus carefully laid out five reasons why He and His disciples did not come under the



authority of Sabbath law. In this account He *demonstrated* His authority and lordship over the Sabbath laws (as they were currently interpreted) in an open, public confrontation with the leaders of Judaism.

### **Summary of a Sabbath in a synagogue**

1. Jesus specifically stated that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath.
2. Jesus openly and publicly confronted the Jewish leaders regarding the *commonly accepted* interpretation of Sabbath law.
3. Jesus healed a man with a non-life-threatening condition on the Sabbath.
4. Jesus was openly angry and grieved at the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts.

### **A Sabbath Dinner with the Pharisees**

(Luke 14:1–6)

And it came about that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely. And there in front of Him was a certain man suffering with dropsy. And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they kept silent. And He took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away. And He said to them, "Which one of you shall have a son [some manuscripts read donkey] or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" And they could make no reply to this.

This episode is very much like the one we just studied with the exception that this one is *planned* by the Pharisees. One gets the idea that the Pharisees and lawyers invited Jesus to dinner for the one purpose of documenting evidence they could use against Him in regard to the violation of the Sabbath. It appears they "planted" this person with dropsy so that he was sitting



right in front of Jesus.

Jesus accepted their challenge but first asked them if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Like schemers running a sting operation, they kept silent. Jesus then healed the man and justified His actions by referring to their own Sabbath behavior in relationship to their animals, implying that a man is more valuable than an animal, and thus deserving of greater Sabbath privileges.

### **Summary of a Sabbath dinner with the Pharisees**

1. It appears that this episode was set up by the Jewish leaders to entrap Jesus:
  - a. The man with dropsy just “happened” to be there in front of Him.
  - b. The Pharisees and lawyers did not answer Jesus’ question, probably for fear that Jesus would disclose their true motives.
2. Jesus healed the man with dropsy on this Sabbath day.
3. Jesus justified His Sabbath behavior on the basis of how the Pharisees, and the others present, took care of their animals on the Sabbath.

### **A Sabbath at Bethesda**

(John 5:1–18; 7:14–24)

The Gospel of John was written later than the other gospels and was clearly written to express certain theological perspectives. John takes for granted that his readers have access to the other gospel accounts and is not concerned with merely giving his account of the events which are recorded in the other gospels *unless* these events fit his overall goals that the reader “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have eternal life” (Jn. 20:31).

Not only this, but John may include events in the life of



Jesus which the other gospel writers did not record, because *from John's perspective in time* these events contribute to the theological needs of his day. There are hints that John is distancing himself from the "Jewish" understanding of things. We see this hint in statements like "the *Jewish* day of preparation" (Jn. 19:42), while Luke, also writing to the Gentiles, simply calls it "the Preparation Day" (Lk. 23:54). John calls the Passover, "the feast of the Jews" (Jn. 6:4). There is some evidence in John's writings that may indicate a movement away from the Sabbath of the old covenant. For this reason he may have included certain Sabbath episodes which are not recorded by the other gospel writers.

This Sabbath incident is very involved and warrants our careful attention. We will divide the text, and our study of it, into three sections.

After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, withered . . . And a certain man was there, who had been thirty-eight years in his sickness. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Arise, take up your pallet, and walk" (Jn. 5:1-9).

We should note again this was *not* a life-threatening emergency. This man had already been there thirty-eight years and a few more days would have done him no harm. Jesus initiated the conversation and in His healing command ordered this man to arise, lift up his bed, and walk.

This healing took place on the Sabbath. The question has often been asked if Jesus commanded this man to



break the Sabbath. Without question, Jesus asked him to openly break the Halakah, the rabbinical laws which were an interpretation of the biblical laws.<sup>2</sup> This man's "pallet" probably consisted of a pad to protect him from the hard stone floor and several blankets to keep him warm during the cold Jerusalem nights. In other words, his "pallet" probably consisted of what would normally be the covers on a bed. Having personally backpacked several hundred miles with modern, lightweight equipment, it is my conclusion that this man's "pallet" would have constituted a "load," which under certain circumstances was forbidden Sabbath activity (Jer. 17:27).

It should also be noted that there was no *good reason* why this man had to carry his "pallet" that day. Jesus could have healed him on the Sabbath and then asked him to go back after sundown, or on the next day, and carry away his bed. One gets the idea that Jesus *purposefully* chose to heal this man on the Sabbath and *deliberately* asked him to do something which would be *considered* a violation of Sabbath law.

For several reasons, however, we cannot say that Jesus actually told this man to break the biblical Sabbath. In general, Sabbath law prevented one from doing *ordinary* work performed during the six workdays, but this is not the case here. Also, if we take the position that Jesus did command this man to break the Sabbath, it raises theological questions which must then be answered. What we can say for a certainty, however, is that the people of Christ's day understood the actions of this man to break the Sabbath law *as they perceived it*.

And immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. Therefore the Jews were saying to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Take up your pallet and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man



who said to you, ‘Take up your pallet, and walk’?” But he who was healed did not know who it was; for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may befall you.” The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God (Jn. 5:9–18).

Looking at these verses in Greek adds additional insight. In verse 18 we read, “because He not only *was breaking* the Sabbath . . .” The “was breaking” is in the continuous tense in Greek, implying that Jesus was repeatedly involved in such activity.<sup>3</sup> The Greek verb here is “eluen,” which comes from the root “luo,” and has the idea of “destroy.” This same verb is used by John in the following verses: “*Destroy* this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19). “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might *destroy* the works of the devil” (1 Jn. 3:8). Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* gives the following possible meanings to this verb as used in the context of John 5:18: “to break up,” “to destroy,” “to dismiss,” “to set aside,” “to invalidate.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, a correct alternate translation would be “because He was not only *destroying* the Sabbath.”

This passage says that the Jews were persecuting Jesus *because* He was destroying, or invalidating, the Sabbath. We should not be too hasty to denounce the Jews. Old covenant Sabbath law *clearly* required that a person who openly broke the Sabbath was to be put to death (Ex. 31:14,15; 35:2). The Pharisees had the old covenant record of the man who was caught gathering sticks on the



Sabbath and was stoned to death at the express command of God for this violation (Num. 15:32–36). They also had the later scriptural interpretations of Sabbath law to prohibit carrying a load on the Sabbath (Jer. 17:27). Not only did these Jewish leaders have a clear biblical statement that carrying a load on the Sabbath was a violation of Sabbath law, but one could excuse the man carrying sticks before he could excuse a man carrying his bedroll except for the fact that he did it at the express command of Jesus. It is assumed that the man gathering sticks was doing so to meet some kind of human need, perhaps for warmth or to cook food, while there was no *good reason* why the man in this incident *had* to carry his bed away *that day*. Therefore, when limiting oneself to the Old Testament Sabbath laws *as the Jews understood them*, the Jewish leaders seemed to be doing the very thing the law required: setting about to put to death one whom *they understood* to have openly and purposefully set aside Sabbath law.

Next we should note Christ's defense of His Sabbath activities. "But He answered them, My Father is *working* until now, and I Myself am *working*." It is very important to note that Jesus did *not* try to prove that His healing activities or His command to "Arise, take up your pallet, and walk" were within the scope of Sabbath law, even though they may have been. Rather Jesus moved the discussion *away from* the supposed violation of Sabbath law *to* His close association with His Father. The Jewish rabbis had correctly concluded that the *rest* which God entered on the seventh day after creation did not apply to God's *work* of upholding the universe.<sup>5</sup> We remember from our study of Genesis that God began the "work" of redemption immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve. It was this "work" that Jesus was continually doing which caused the Jewish leaders to persecute Jesus. As upholding creation is above the rest of Sabbath law, so is



God's *work* of redemption. This work far supersedes the Sabbath laws of the Pharisees and even the *letter* of the Old Testament Sabbath laws. It is the goal of redemption to restore the conditions which existed on that first seventh day when God rested.

Look carefully at the whole of verse 18. These are the words of the Gospel writer, John, but are probably the reflections of the accusations of the Pharisees.

For this cause the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only *was breaking* [or destroying] *the Sabbath*, but also was calling God His own Father, *making Himself equal with God* (Jn. 5:18).

Were these accusations correct? Throughout the gospel of John the divinity of Jesus is portrayed as a *major* theme. "The Word was God . . . The Word became flesh (Jn. 1:1–3, 14). "Before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn. 8:58), etc. The clear wording and the literary structure force us to conclude that *both* of these statements (that Jesus was breaking or destroying the Sabbath and calling God His own Father) are true, and because they are true, they were the reasons why the Jews sought all the more to kill Jesus. We must immediately add, however, that His Sabbath violation is valid only when one interprets the *letter* of the Sabbath law in a narrow, legalistic way, as the Jews of Christ's day did.

In the next few verses Jesus gives thirteen reasons which prove two things. First, they show the close association between Himself and His Father, confirming the fact that Jesus is indeed equal with the Father. Second, they show why He, like His Father, must continue to *work*, even if the Jewish leaders considered His work to be a violation of Sabbath law. (1) He does only what the Father does (Jn. 5:19). (2) The Son gives (eternal) life to whom He wishes (Jn. 5:21). (3) The Father has given all judgment to the Son (Jn. 5:22). (4) All are to honor the Son just as they honor the Father (Jn. 5:23). (5) The one



who believes (in Jesus) is not judged (Jn. 5:24). (6) The Son of God will raise the dead (Jn. 5:25). (7) The Son has life in Himself (Jn. 5:26). (8) As the Son of Man, Jesus has the authority to execute judgment (Jn. 5:27). (9) Jesus' judgment is just (Jn. 5:30). (10) Jesus' authority is backed by two witnesses (to make it legal according to Jewish law), the Father and John the Baptist (Jn. 5:31–33). (11) The purpose of Jesus' taking all authority is for the Jews' salvation (Jn. 5:34). (12) If they reject the witness of John, which the Jewish leaders did, then the two legal witnesses are the Father and the very works of Jesus (Jn. 5:35–37). (13) The Scriptures also testify of Jesus (Jn. 5:39).

At this point Jesus, as the Son of Man who has authority to sit in judgment, takes the judgment seat and turns the tables on the Pharisees by saying,

Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writing, how will you believe My words (Jn. 5:45–47)?

These last few verses should not be passed over too quickly, for they give additional insight regarding the Sabbath. First, they corroborate what we have concluded before: Jesus, by virtue of His divinity, is above the letter of Sabbath law. Secondly, Jesus, in the context of this Sabbath incident, says that Moses wrote of Him. Could it be that Jesus was saying that the Sabbath, as set forth in the old covenant, was an institution which was to point forward to the coming of Jesus and His work? Could it be that the Sabbath, which on the one hand pointed back to the open fellowship Adam had with God before sin entered, also pointed forward to the open fellowship a justified believer can have with God? Could it be that the laws of the Sabbath, over which the Pharisees were stumbling, were the very laws which should have directed



them to the only One who could bring in the true rest of God?

Two chapters later, in John 7, Jesus refers back to this Sabbath incident. Notice His comments.

Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one deed [Greek is 'work'], and you all marvel. On this account Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath that the Law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:21–24).

Jesus is defending His previous act of healing the man at the pool of Bethesda. It is of interest to note that He does not focus on the man's carrying his bedroll, but on the healing. Notice His two arguments. First, He shows that in Jewish law circumcision took precedence over the Sabbath. From our previous study of the old covenant we saw why this was so. The Sabbath was a sign between God and the "sons of Israel" (Ex. 31:17). However, to become a "son of Israel" a male had to be circumcised. It was then and then *only* that the Sabbath law applied. As we saw in our study of the old covenant, circumcision was the entrance sign of the covenant, and Sabbath was the continuing sign of that covenant. Jesus' first argument draws a parallel between the Jewish practice of circumcising on the eighth day, even if it fell on the Sabbath, and His "work" of making a whole man well on the Sabbath.

The first argument is based upon old covenant law. The second argument is based upon a *different reference point*. The Jews saw, and judged, the actions of Jesus *from the reference point of the old covenant law*. They were judging "according to appearance." Jesus, on the other hand, *has a different reference point*: "judge with righteous judgment." What is "righteous judgment"? He



told them in the last part of Chapter 5: "For not even the Father judges any one, but He has given all judgment to the *Son*" (Jn. 5:22). "He gave *Him* [the Son] authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man" (Jn. 5:27). "*My judgment* is just; because I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me." Here, Jesus asserts His deity by showing that He will be the one who sits as Judge in the final judgment. And because of this, His conduct is above question. } see Rom 3.4

It appears Jesus openly and willfully commanded the healed man to do something which the Jewish leaders would consider to be a violation of Sabbath law as Jesus continued His "work" of redemption. Jesus did this in order that He might show them who He really was and thus move their reference point of life and judgment from the old covenant laws to Himself. He was seeking to help them make a transition from the old covenant (Sinai laws) to the new covenant (His words). Jesus was showing the Jewish leaders that He, as the Son of Man, was now the true reference point for all life and judgment. Further, these Jewish leaders stood condemned by the very Sabbath laws which they were using to condemn Jesus, because a *primary purpose* of the Sabbath laws was to point them to the coming Messiah. The "work" of the Messiah was to take away the curse of sin which ended that perfect Eden "rest" and restore man to intimate fellowship with God. Thus, while Jesus was seeking to move the Jewish leaders from the old covenant Sabbath laws, He was also seeking to restore the true rest of fellowship with God, of which the Sabbath laws were a type. This would happen *only* as the people acknowledged His authority as greater than the authority of the old covenant.

Jesus took great personal risk by commanding this man to take up his bed and walk on the Sabbath. His Sabbath activities were the foundation of a major part of the hatred that developed between Himself and the Jewish leaders



which ultimately led to His crucifixion. Jesus knowingly and purposefully took this risk to usher in the true “*rest*” of God where man once again would be at peace with his Creator.

### **Summary of a Sabbath at Bethesda**

1. The man Jesus healed was not in a life-threatening situation.
2. It appears that Jesus purposefully commanded this man to carry his pallet, a violation of Old Testament Sabbath law *as the Jews understood it*.
3. The story gives no reasons why this man had to carry his pallet on the Sabbath day.
4. Jesus did not try to argue His nonviolation of Sabbath law; rather, in answer to the persecution of the Pharisees, He defended His “work” on the Sabbath by showing His close association with His Father, stating that because His Father continued to work He could also.
5. The Greek verb used in Jn. 5:18 indicates that Jesus was continually involved in activities which the Jews considered to be breaking, destroying or invalidating the Sabbath.
6. John reflects the Pharisees’ charge against Jesus by saying that Jesus was breaking or destroying the Sabbath and making Himself equal with God.
7. Because of Jesus’ supposed Sabbath breaking and His claim to equality with God, the Jewish leaders sought all the more to kill Him.
8. Jesus, instead of trying to fit His activities within the context of the letter of Old Testament Sabbath law, established His own authority by showing the close association between Himself and the Father and why He must continue to work.
  - a. He did only what the Father was continually doing.



- b. He gives eternal life to whom He wishes.
  - c. The Father had given all judgment to the Son.
  - d. All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.
  - e. The one who believes in Jesus is *not* judged.
  - f. The Son of God will raise the dead.
  - g. The Son has life in Himself.
  - h. As the Son of Man He has authority to execute judgment.
  - i. His judgment is just.
  - j. His authority is legal because it is backed by two witnesses: John the Baptist and His Father.
  - k. The purpose of Jesus' taking authority is for their salvation.
  - l. If they didn't accept John's witness, then He had two more: His own works and the Scriptures.
  - m. The Scriptures testify of Jesus.
9. Jesus took His prerogative as the Son of Man, who is to execute judgment, by telling His accusers Moses would accuse them for Moses wrote of Him. It can be assumed, by considering the context of this Sabbath incident, that Jesus is referring to the Sabbath as the means by which Moses spoke of Jesus.
10. When considering this incident as a whole, it appears that Jesus was purposefully seeking to move the Jewish leaders' reference point of life and judgment from the old covenant laws to Himself.
11. Jesus took great personal risk in this attempt to show Himself as the reference point of life and judgment in the new covenant.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> C. Rowland, *A summary of Sabbath Observance in Judaism at the Beginning of the Christian Era*, in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, p. 46.




<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels*, in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament, The Gospel of John*, p. 307.

<sup>4</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 336.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, unpublished *Commentary on John*, p. 385.



One cannot go both  directions; either he is a  
disciple of Jesus or a disciple of Moses.



## Chapter 9

### THE PARADOX OF SABBATH LAW

#### John 9

This story, like those in John 5 and 7, is a very important one and deserves our most careful attention. Again, we must not lose sight of any of the details in this chapter for they will give us insight into the deeper meaning intended by the author. This is a long chapter in John's gospel and we cannot overlook any part of it. We will study it in sections, then at the conclusion try to pull all the ideas together.

And as He [Jesus] passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying "Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the *works* of God might be displayed in him. We must *work* the *works* of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can *work*. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn. 9:1–5).

This chapter starts with a man who was born blind. The reason for this blindness is that "the *works* of God might be displayed in him" (Jn. 9:3). It is important to note the frequent use of the word "work" in the beginning of this Sabbath experience. It is to alert us to the underlying theme of what follows. Jesus will again be accused of Sabbath breaking because of His *work* in healing this man. This, perhaps more than any other *work* of Jesus, will demonstrate the true nature of the "rest" of the new covenant.



We will soon see that Jesus and the Jewish leaders were thinking and conversing from two different reference points. It is almost as if they were "talking past" each other. Jesus understood what was going on, but the Jewish leaders seemed to have clouded reasoning and completely misunderstood Jesus. The *reason* for this misunderstanding is clear. The Jewish leaders had not moved from their reference point of the old covenant law. It is equally true that Jesus continued to speak from His reference point: Himself, the new covenant center.

For Jesus the word "work" refers to doing the works of God—kingdom work, Jubilee ministry: healing the sick, casting out demons, releasing the captives, binding up the brokenhearted, opening the eyes of the blind, preaching the gospel to the poor, proclaiming the favorable year of the Lord. This work was designed to *restore the rest of Eden's seventh day*—the true "rest" of God. The Jewish leaders, on the other hand, understood "work" to be that which was forbidden by a literal and rigid interpretation of old covenant Sabbath law.

We note that Jesus seemed to express a certain sense of urgency. "We *must* work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work." Jesus included His disciples as fellow participants in this urgent work, "We must work . . ." They, too, were to be engaged in the kingdom, Jubilee "work" of proclaiming the "rest" of God.

Jesus declared Himself to be the "light of the world." We will see that those who do not believe in Him remain in the "blindness" of sin.

When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). And so he went away and washed, and came back seeing (Jn. 9:6,7).

As was noted in the previous chapter, it appears that



Jesus intentionally healed this man in such a way that His actions would be seen to be an open violation of Sabbath law *as the Jews understood it*. To us, making a little clay seems trivial and certainly not work. However, to the Jewish leaders, who operated from a legalistic interpretation of the old covenant, “making” clay was working and the law said, “you shall not do *any* work” (Ex. 20:10). They felt this action was not in accord with the admonition of the law to have a “sabbath of *complete rest*” (Ex. 31:15). Further, they felt that Jesus’ instruction to send this man across town was not adhering to the command which said, “Remain every man in his place” (Ex. 16:29). Nor was “washing” in the pool of Siloam, which was big enough to swim in, an appropriate Sabbath activity. Washing was to be taken care of on the day of preparation.

As is often encountered in the writings of John, small, apparently insignificant details provide additional evidence to support John’s underlying purpose in writing this gospel: that the reader would come to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing, you may have life in His name” (Jn. 20:31). In the passage at hand we have such details. Not only does John record that Jesus sent this blind man to the pool of Siloam, but he includes the translation of the meaning of the name, Siloam, as “sent.” This little clue is to remind us of other passages in John’s gospel. “My food is to do the will of Him who *sent* Me, and to accomplish His work” (Jn. 4:34). “And the Father who *sent* Me, He has born witness of Me” (Jn. 5:37). John is seeking to lead his readers to a true understanding of who Jesus is.

“And so he went away and washed, and came back seeing” (Jn. 9:7). Nothing could be more direct and to the point or less flamboyant. At the same time we see the possible connections to the “washing” of baptism and the “seeing” of saving faith.



The neighbors therefore, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" Others were saying, "This is he," still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." Therefore they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam, and wash'; so I went and washed, and I received sight." And they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know" (Jn. 9:8-12).

At first this short passage appears to have little to do with our study of the Sabbath, yet in reality it encompasses the *very essence* of new covenant Sabbath understanding. It is full of subtle insights regarding the gospel. First, notice the saving action of Jesus. This beggar did not ask to be healed! The entire action proceeded from Jesus. Second, note the kind of people Jesus chooses to save: blind beggars, people who have a strong sense of personal need. Third, note the simplicity of salvation: "I washed, and I received sight." Fourth, note the transformation that takes place: his friends could hardly recognize him! Fifth, note the drawing power of the gospel: "Where is He?"

We begin to see that in each Sabbath exposure there is a progressive movement *away from* the details of the old covenant laws *toward* the one, central theme of the new: Jesus Christ and the salvation "rest" He brings.

They brought to the Pharisees him who was formerly blind. Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. Again therefore the Pharisees also were asking him how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such



signs?" And there was a division among them (Jn. 9: 13–16).

It appears from this passage that Jesus was making some headway in moving the reference point of judgment held by the Jewish leaders. In previous instances involving Sabbath breaking the Jewish leaders presented a united front against Jesus. Now, only "some of the Pharisees" stumbled over the old covenant Sabbath law and said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath" (v. 16). Now, *some* are apparently willing to look at Him from the "Jubilee ministry" perspective of the new covenant. They evaluate the ministry of Jesus saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" So "there was a division among them."

They said therefore to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet." The Jews therefore did not believe it of him, that he had been blind, and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he see?" His parents answered them, and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he shall speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed, that if any one should confess Him to be Christ he should be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him" (Jn. 9:17–23).

This is a very enlightening, and tragic, portion of Scripture. Jesus, through the healing of this man born blind, desperately sought to bring sufficient evidence for an intelligent, saving faith to the leaders of the people He came to save. He knew that the new wine of the gospel would not fit within the rigid framework of Judaism. Jesus, through this healing incident, tried to reach their



hearts with the truth of who He was. This truth, and this truth alone, could save them. The tragedy of their situation was that they were so deeply entrenched within their own belief system most of them could not even entertain the idea they could possibly be wrong. "The Jews had *already agreed*, that if any one should confess Him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." This prejudice, or prejudgment, blinded their minds. It appears from time to time, however, there were some of the Jewish rulers who, at least for a period of time, seemed almost persuaded to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. What kept the majority back? Several times in this book I have referred to the fact that our own belief system is often our greatest hindrance to the openness essential to the discovery of new truth. The Jews had their system, which in itself was a major factor in their inability to believe. Yet there was more to their system than just what they considered to be "truth." It provided them with a complete lifestyle, a social community, power, wealth, and influence. To break out of the system was costly in many ways. Thus the books of Hebrews and First Peter were written to encourage Jewish Christians who had paid the price and had broken out of the Jewish system. These people had lost their wealth, their lands, their friends, and their influence. They had nothing left but Jesus—Jesus only! Yet, as Paul so beautifully says,

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and may be found in Him (Phil. 3:8,9).

Christians throughout history who have stood for truth, regardless of the consequences, and paid the price for so doing, know that to be found "in Christ" is of grater value than the loss of all other things. Jesus is sufficient.

So a second time they called the man who had been



blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." He therefore answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." They said therefore to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" (Jn. 9: 24-27).

One gets the idea that the Pharisees <sup>mis understood</sup> were struggling in the valley of decision. The evidence before their eyes must have been like sharp needles pricking their consciences. It appears they recognized the far-reaching consequences of the decision which confronted them and they made every effort to find sufficient reason to escape making a decision. They wanted more time. Then, as this formerly blind beggar suggested the idea that perhaps they too were considering becoming disciples of Jesus, they revolted and their decision was made. <sub>see Lk 1</sub>

And they reviled him, and said, "*You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses*" (Jn. 9:28).

This is a key verse in this chapter and a very important one in our study of the Sabbath. *Here is the confrontation between the new covenant and the old covenant.* This is Moses (Sinai) pitted against Christ. One *cannot* go both directions; either he is a *disciple of Jesus*, or a *disciple of Moses*. In the next few verses we can sense the deep spiritual insight of this formerly blind beggar, and the appalling spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, who had been confronted with the truth of Jesus and who He was, but had opted to remain disciples of Moses.

The Pharisees answered this new disciple of Jesus with,

"We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from and yet He opened my eyes" (Jn. 9:29,30).



To fully understand what is taking place here we must look at a passage in John 7 which immediately follows the discussion of the Sabbath incident regarding the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda.

Therefore some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill? And look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they? However we know where this man is from; but *whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from*" (Jn. 7:25–27).

This new disciple of Jesus picks up the foolishness of the people's reasoning. In one incident they reject Jesus because they *know* from where He comes and state that when the Messiah does come they will not know from where He comes. The next moment they reject Jesus as the Christ because they do *not know* from where He comes! Yet He is opening the eyes of the blind; doing the very things Messiah was to do!

This "seeing" disciple of Jesus continues to witness to the learned, but "blind," Pharisees, bringing insight after insight which must have hit them like burning arrows.

We know that God does not hear sinners; but if any one is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that any one opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing (Jn. 9:31–33).

This was a powerful argument which could not be answered. The credentials of Jesus were founded in His kingdom work, His Jubilee ministry. The Pharisees had no answer, and, utterly humiliated by the logic and spiritual insight of this new disciple of Jesus, they answer, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they put him out" (Jn. 9:32–34).

The Pharisees did to this new disciple of Christ what religious (in contrast to truly Christian) leaders have done



throughout the centuries to those who have taken a stand for truth. They “put him out.” His parents had avoided speaking in favor of Jesus so they would not be disfellowshipped,

For the Jews had *already agreed*, that if any one should confess Him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22).

Consider carefully the Sabbath theology taught, the depth of meaning uncovered, the love expressed, and the needs met in the next few verses. These verses are the high point of our study on Jesus and the Sabbath. They lead us to the true “rest” of God.

Jesus heard that they had put him out; and finding him, He said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered and said, “And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.” And he said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshipped Him (Jn. 9:35–38).

Jesus not only knew that His new disciple had been disfellowshipped, but He cared. He still knows and cares. Jesus set out to find this man so young in his newfound faith. I am reminded of the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15. The Good Shepherd searched for the lost sheep *until He found him*. He still does. Jesus gave this young-in-faith disciple an opportunity to receive a further revelation of truth. The new disciple’s understanding of Christ at this point was very limited. He understood Christ to be “a Prophet” (Jn. 9:17). Yet, with his limited knowledge of Jesus, his uneducated background, this previously blind beggar who had no axe of self-interest to grind, openly confessed himself on the side of Jesus. His *only* motive was that of gratitude. As he began to move out in his limited knowledge and experience, Jesus met him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” Today that same Son of Man still gives opportunity for



greater revelations of truth to those who walk in the full knowledge of what they have already received, no matter how limited that truth is. Jesus did not condemn or make fun of this young disciple's lack of insight. By asking this man if he believed, it appears Jesus expected His new disciple to recognize Him as the Son of Man, but the man answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe?" I thank God that He still treats with kindness and patience those of us who seem to be so dull of hearing and so slow to receive spiritual insight. Jesus gave His new disciple a revelation of truth which met his greatest need: *He revealed Himself*. Today the greatest longing in the heart of God is still to make Himself known to us. It is *only His presence* which will meet the real need of our heart. John records the simplicity, and workability, of the new covenant gospel. "Lord, I believe." The new covenant gospel is still simple and it still works. Do you believe? If you do, then the last insight of this passage will be your highest priority, your greatest joy: "And he worshipped Him."

Consider the paradoxical nature of this incident. The Pharisees, who were known to be meticulous observers of old covenant sabbath laws, *by their meticulous observance of these laws*, rejected the Messiah, to whom these laws pointed. As disciples of Moses, their point of reference and judgment was like a yoke around their neck which bound them. In striving hard to obtain, they failed. The blind beggar, on the other hand, did not strive. Rather his healing, his insight, his acceptance, his restored relationship to God and intimate, face-to-face fellowship with Jesus were the result of nothing but God's sovereign grace! *Here, in stark contrast, are the principles of the two covenants operating side by side. If one is to be a disciple of Jesus, he cannot, at the same time, be a disciple of Moses.* as misunderstood

But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over



their heart; but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away (2 Cor. 3:15,16).

More important to our study, these verses provide rich insight regarding the true nature of the Sabbath. Here, too, is a great paradox. As mentioned before, the Pharisees were strict Sabbath keepers. They followed the old covenant Sabbath laws to the letter. Yet in following these laws they completely missed the true “rest” of God. On the other hand, this blind beggar, saved by faith, entered into the true “rest” of God.

The seventh-day-creation rest in Eden was characterized by face-to-face fellowship between man and His Creator. This was before the curse of sin, before the enmity man developed as a result of sin. As we pointed out in the chapter, *Shadows of Hope*, it appears that the Sabbath laws had their origin in the way things were in Eden. There was no work in Eden; work came as a result of sin. There was no need to build a fire. There was no need to buy or sell, for Adam and Eve could eat freely from the fruit of the garden. There was no need to leave the garden where the Lord met them in the cool of the day. For these reasons, it would seem the Sinaitic Sabbath of the old covenant was a way of acting out, in a sinful environment, the conditions which existed in the sinless environment of Eden. It pointed the Israelites back to the perfect beginning when “all was very good.” However, the Sabbath laws served as shadows of hope; they were weekly, seasonal, and yearly reminders that the intimate fellowship between man and God and the associated blessings which existed on that seventh-day-creation rest were to be restored. It told them that a day was coming when they would be freed, when they could return to their fathers’ land, when the work would be finished, and all debts canceled. The sons of Israel were to look forward to the blowing of the trumpet on the Day of Atonement when they would again live in the “favorable year of the Lord.”



That hope was realized in Jesus as He said in His first Sabbath sermon: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21).

With this insight let us come back to the passage in John. This previously blind beggar has become a "new creation."

If any man is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Cor. 5:17).

This child of God is now a new man: *healed, washed, found, accepted, and worshiping in intimate, face-to-face fellowship with none other than the Creator Himself. Here is the true "rest of God" to which the old covenant Sabbath laws pointed.* No work was done by this man! All was of grace. This blind man was found, healed, washed, and accepted, by the "work" of Jesus on that Sabbath day. This man entered into the "rest" which "remains" for the one who believes! Jesus' "work" on that Sabbath brought Eden's "rest" to this man.

And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind." Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things, and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see,' your sin remains" (Jn. 9:39-41).

These are sad, tragic words of Jesus. Yet they serve as a solemn warning to those who are deeply entrenched within their belief system and believe they have the truth and are the true people of God. *They are fearful words for those who are still bound to Sinai for their reference point of life and judgment.*

### Chapter Summary

1. The "work" of Jesus was kingdom work—Jubilee ministry.



2. The disciples of Jesus were included in this urgent “work.”
3. It appears that Jesus again, openly and intentionally, violated the Pharisees’ interpretation of Sabbath law.
4. The Pharisees, when confronted with the truth of Jesus, rejected Him *because* they were blinded by their reference point of judgment: Sinaitic laws.
5. This chapter points out in stark contrast the two systems: Christ (the new covenant) and Moses (the old covenant).
6. This incident is paradoxical in nature.
  - a. The Pharisees cast this man out of their fellowship.
  - b. Jesus took this man into fellowship with Himself.
  - c. The Pharisees who meticulously observed the Sabbath laws totally missed the *real rest* to which these laws pointed.
  - d. The blind beggar, who did not work but was saved by grace, entered into the true “rest of God”: intimate, face-to-face fellowship with the Creator.
  - e. The learned Pharisees, who almost knew the Old Testament law by heart, seemed to be steeped in spiritual blindness.
  - f. The previously blind beggar, who knew little, if any, of the law, and was considered to be totally born in sin, showed deep spiritual insight.
  - g. The “work” of Jesus was to establish His “rest.”
  - h. According to the Jews, Jesus broke the Sinaitic Sabbath, but in doing so He brought in the true “rest.”
7. Jesus pronounced a solemn warning upon those who say “they see” (know the truth) yet in reality they are “blind” and “remain” in sin.



8. The underlying dynamic of Jesus was to move the reference point of the Pharisees from Sinai to Himself.



## Chapter 10

### THE SABBATH IN ACTS

This chapter will examine all the Sabbath incidents in the book of Acts to discover what, if anything, is *taught* regarding the Sabbath and what can be learned by the Sabbath *behavior* of the early believers. It is important to look carefully at each Sabbath episode.

#### Acts 13:13–52

But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the *Sabbath* day they went into the synagogue and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.” And Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand, he said . . . (Acts 13: 14–16).

At this point Paul begins a sermon which continues through verse 41. It becomes immediately evident that Paul’s subject matter is *not* the Sabbath, but the good news of Christ. Paul does, however, make an incidental reference to the Sabbath.

For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every *Sabbath*, fulfilled these by condemning Him (Acts 13:27).

At the conclusion of Paul’s exhortation Luke records,

And as Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people



kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next *Sabbath*. Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. And the next *Sabbath* nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:42–46).

At this word the Gentiles rejoiced (Acts 13:48), and the gospel spread through the whole region (Acts 13:49). The Jews instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district (Acts 13:50).

This event was early in Paul's ministry. These Sabbath meetings were held in a *Jewish synagogue*, for the benefit of a Jewish congregation; they were not meetings of Christian believers.

### Summary of Acts 13:13–52

1. Nothing is *taught* regarding the seventh-day Sabbath.
2. These two Sabbath meetings were held in a *Jewish synagogue*.
3. Paul and Barnabas went to this synagogue to preach the gospel of Christ because they felt the Jews should hear it first.
4. The only mention of the Sabbath in Paul's sermon is in connection with the Jews at Jerusalem who rejected the very Christ whom they read about in the Prophets each Sabbath.



**Acts 16:11–40**

Paul and his companions came to Philippi, where they stayed for some days.

And on the *Sabbath* day we went outside the gate to a river side, where we were supposing that there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay” (Acts 16:12–15).

Following this the narrative tells of Paul casting out a spirit of divination from a certain slave girl. The masters of this girl, having now lost their source of monetary profit, complained to the authorities regarding Paul and his companions. This in turn led to their beating, arrest and incarceration. While in jail, there was an earthquake which resulted in the jailer’s conversion. After the jailer and his house were baptized, Paul was freed, spoke briefly with the new converts in the home of Lydia, and then left town.

**Summary of Acts 16:11–40**

1. Nothing is *taught* regarding the Sabbath.
2. On the Sabbath day Paul and his companions sought out a gathering of *Jewish* proselytes (God worshippers) who met for prayer by a river side. (Apparently there was no synagogue in Philippi at that time.)
3. Paul’s message was the gospel of Christ.
4. Paul preached the gospel to the jailer and baptized his whole household.

**Acts 17:1–9**

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and



Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a *synagogue* of the *Jews*. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three *Sabbaths* *reasoned with them* from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ" (Acts. 17:1–3).

A few of the Jews, a "great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women" accepted the gospel. The Jews created such a disturbance that Paul and his companions had to leave town.

### Summary of Acts 17:1–9

1. Nothing is *taught* regarding the Sabbath.
2. The message of Paul was the gospel of Jesus.
3. It was Paul's custom to go to the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath and from the Scriptures seek to persuade those present that Jesus was the Christ.
4. Paul "reasoned" with the Jews here for three Sabbaths.

### Acts 18:1–17

In this section we find Paul coming to the city of Corinth.

And he was reasoning in the synagogue every *Sabbath* and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4).

Soon, however, the Jews began to resist his efforts.

And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads, I am clean; from now on I shall go to the Gentiles." And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, a worshipper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized (Acts 18:6–8).



God gave Paul a vision in which He encouraged him to keep on speaking about Christ, so Paul “settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11).

Some have used this passage to prove Paul “kept” seventy-eight Sabbaths while in Corinth. To do this they read verse 4, which says that Paul was in the synagogue “every” Sabbath. Then they read verse 11, which states Paul stayed in Corinth a year and six months. Every Sabbath for a year and six months equals seventy-eight Sabbaths that Paul kept.

However, a careful study of this passage makes it clear that this argument and resulting conclusion are in error. First, “every Sabbath” cannot refer to the whole time Paul was in Corinth. Verse 7 shows that Paul was forced to leave the synagogue and go to a house next door. So he reasoned with the Jews *in their synagogue* only three weeks. He did stay there a year and six months, but these facts alone neither support nor deny his Sabbath keeping.

In Acts 19 we have a similar account of Paul’s ministry both in and out of the synagogue.

And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning *daily* in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8,9).

When Paul was forced to leave the Jewish synagogue, where it is assumed he met on Sabbath, he then had *daily* meetings in the School of Tyrannus.

### **Summary of Acts 18:1–11**

1. Nothing is *taught* regarding the Sabbath.
2. Paul’s message was to convince those present that Jesus was the Christ.



3. We know that Paul was “reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath,” but the fact that he was forced to leave the synagogue, apparently quite early in his stay in Corinth, shows that this “synagogue” practice did not necessarily continue for the full year and a half.

### **Incidental References to the Sabbath in Acts**

In Acts 1:12 we read,

Then they [the disciples] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away.

Here, Luke, the writer of Acts, is describing how far the mount of Olives is from Jerusalem by the use of the term “a Sabbath day’s journey.”

Acts 15:21 mentions the Sabbath in connection with the Jerusalem Council. The context of this verse is the final decision of the Council, which stated that the Gentiles did not have to keep the law of Moses, rather they were only required to “abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood (Acts 15:20). Then follows this verse,

For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every *Sabbath* (Acts 15:21).

It is clear these Sabbath meetings where Moses was read were Jewish meetings. Note that (1) they are places which have been established “from ancient generations,” (2) they are “synagogues,” (3) they are “in every city.” These characteristics would not fit the early Christian assemblies, many of which were in homes (cf. Rom. 16:5, 1 Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15, Phile. 1:2). Of greater interest to our study is the fact that it is in these *Jewish synagogues* where Moses is read every Sabbath.



### Chapter Summary

1. In *all* the Sabbath meetings recorded in the Book of Acts, *not once* is the Sabbath the point of discussion. Nothing is *taught* regarding the Sabbath.
2. In *every* Sabbath incident recorded in the Book of Acts Paul is seeking to persuade the Jews, and others, that Jesus is the Christ. The subject of the teaching is *always* the gospel.
3. *Every* Sabbath incident recorded in the Book of Acts is in connection with a *Jewish meeting*. All but one are in a Jewish synagogue, the one exception being the meeting by a river side in Philippi where there was no synagogue. Here again, it was a meeting place for “God-worshippers”—a name used to describe converts to Judaism.
4. When going to a new city it was Paul’s custom, or method of approach, to first go to the Jewish synagogue and “reason with them from the Scriptures.” He would do this every Sabbath until the Jews threw him out, usually only two or three weeks, then he would direct his ministry to the Gentiles.
5. It is in the Jewish synagogues where Moses is read every Sabbath.



Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and a willingness to follow it when it is revealed.



## Chapter 11

### SABBATH IN THE EPISTLES

In the last chapter we studied about Paul and his companions as they went to *Jewish synagogues* to preach Christ. We found that in every instance their Sabbath activities were in connection with *Jewish services*. In contrast, this chapter deals with letters written to *Christian churches*. We will now study three key verses that relate to the Sabbath (Colossians 2:16,17; Galatians 4:10,11; Romans 14:5,6) then examine Paul's method of evangelism.

#### Colossians 2:16,17

Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a *Sabbath day*—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Unlike the references to the Sabbath in the book of Acts, this passage is a direct teaching on the subject of the Sabbath. In this verse Paul includes the Sabbath with other old covenant convocations such as new moon celebrations and festivals. This verse has been vigorously debated and the debate often centers on three key areas. What does Paul mean by "Sabbath day"? Is he referring to the weekly Sabbath, the seven seasonal sabbaths such as the Passover, etc., or is he addressing the problem of Sabbath perversion?



What are the “elementary principles” Paul mentions in (Col. 2:8,20)? Is he referring to a rudiment of some syncretistic heresy that the Colossians had fallen into or is he referring to old covenant convocations or perhaps both?

How are we to understand “Let no man judge you” (Col. 2:16)? Were certain members of the Colossian church keeping certain celebrations while *others* judged them? Or were the ones *practicing* the celebrations judging the ones who did not?

Let us first study the context, then we will define “elementary principles,” and “Sabbath day(s)” and then draw some conclusions regarding the ones who were judging and how all of this relates to our study of the Sabbath.

### Local context

A quick scan of Colossians 2:8–23 will help us in our interpretation.

See to it that no one take you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to *the elementary principles of the world*, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and *in Him you have been made complete*, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh *by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism*, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, *having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. *Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival*



*or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.* Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast the Head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

If you have *died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world*, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

In Colossians 2 Paul is writing about the completeness of Christ and His sacrifice. In verse 8 Paul begins by warning his readers against *several things* which can take them away from their completeness in Christ and His sacrifice and thus make them captive to discouragement and loss.

### “Elementary principles of the world”

See to it that no one take you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the *elementary principles of the world*, rather than according to Christ (Col. 2:8).

What does Paul mean by the “elementary principles of the world”? Notice how he uses this term (identical in Greek) elsewhere.

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, *were held in bondage under the elementary things of the world*. But when the fullness of time came,



God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who *were under the Law*, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gal. 4:1–5).

In the above passage Paul says that before the coming of Christ the Jews were “held in bondage under the elementary things of the world.” He explains what he means by this term when he says that God sent forth His Son to redeem “those who were under the Law.” Here he defines the “elementary things of the world” as the old covenant law.

In Hebrews 5 this term is also used. Here again “the elementary principles” are “the oracles of God”—*the old covenant writings*. In explaining how Christ is a better High priest than the priests of the old covenant the writer says:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you *the elementary principles of the oracles of God*, and you have come to need milk and not solid food (Heb. 5:12).

In Colossians 2:20,21 Paul speaks about *dying* to the elementary principles of the world.

If you *have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world*, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”

In Romans 7 Paul writes,

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to *die to the Law* through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God (Rom. 7:4).

In Colossians Paul speaks of *dying* with Christ to the *elementary principles* of the world; in Romans He speaks of *dying* to the *law* through Christ. Again Paul uses “elementary principles” in connection with the old covenant law.



Since Paul uses the term “elementary principles” to apply to old covenant law on several other occasions, we can and should use this meaning in Colossians unless the context forbids it.

### You are complete in Christ

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and *in Him you have been made complete*, and He is the head over all rule and authority (Col. 2:9,10).

This is Paul’s central argument. He courageously defends the position that Jesus is the testing truth for salvation. He is forthright in stating that the believer in Christ is *complete*. This is the truth he is defending against those who are saying, “Yes, Paul, Jesus is the truth, *but* ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5).

### Circumcision = Baptism

And *in Him you were also circumcised* with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh *by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism*, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions (Col. 2:11–13).

In these passages Paul takes the old covenant sign of circumcision and shows how Christ *symbolically fulfilled* this concept and then *links circumcision with baptism*. This is no accident! As circumcision was the entrance sign into the old covenant community for the sons of Israel, so baptism is the entrance sign into the new covenant community for the church.

Circumcision not only served as the entrance sign to the old covenant, Paul shows how it *also pointed forward to*



Christ, yet it does *not* continue as a sign in the new covenant. In the new covenant baptism replaces circumcision.

### Decree nailed to the cross

Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having *nailed it to the cross*. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (Col. 2:14,15).

What was the “certificate of debt” or the “decrees” which were nailed to the cross? In context, Paul has been speaking about the old covenant. Was the old covenant “against us”? We should remember from our study of the old covenant that one of its functions was to act as a “testimony” against Israel if they sinned.

Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness *against* you (Deut. 31:26).

The cursings associated with the broken law *and* the ability of the law to condemn were both taken away when Christ was nailed to the cross. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

### Other hang-ups

According to Paul *one way* the Christians at Colossae could lose the precious freedom of being complete in Christ was to place themselves back under old covenant law. In Colossians 2:18–23 he speaks of *other ways* they could do the same thing. Here he mentions such things as worship of angels, self-made religion, self-abasement, and severe treatment of the body, etc., all of no value. Paul may have reference here to certain strict sects of Judaism, such as the Essenes, who practiced extreme self-discipline,



or perhaps to certain pre-gnostic influences that were invading the Colossian church.

### **Sabbath days**

The word for Sabbath in Colossians 2:16 is plural in Greek and could be translated “Sabbath days.” However, the fact that it is plural does *not* mean it cannot have a singular meaning. For example, in *all* the following passages the word “Sabbath” is plural in Greek but the context requires a singular meaning.

“Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields” (Mt. 12:1), “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good?” (Lk. 6:9), “On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a river side” (Acts 16:13). In these verses it is clear that the Greek word for “Sabbath days” *must* be translated with a singular meaning. One cannot, therefore, say that because in Colossians 2:16,17 the word for Sabbath is plural in Greek it must therefore not refer to the seventh-day Sabbath. In many other New Testament references the plural Greek word for Sabbath is translated as the seventh-day Sabbath.

### **Weekly or seasonal Sabbaths?**

Is the Sabbath day mentioned in verse 16 the seventh-day Sabbath or does it refer to the yearly, seasonal Sabbaths?

Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day (Col. 2:16).

From the local context it is evident that the items in Colossians 2:16 are derived from the old covenant, but we cannot, from the local context, make a definitive conclusion whether or not the Sabbath is the weekly Sabbath or the yearly seasonal feasts such as Passover, the Day of Atonement, etc. However, the Old Testament



usages of the terms listed in Colossians 2:16 (food, drink, festival, new moon, and Sabbath) make the conclusion clear beyond question.

## Old Testament context

In the chapter, *Shadows of Hope*, we saw that when the old covenant convocations such as Sabbaths, new moons, festivals (yearly feasts), etc., were mentioned, they were listed in either ascending or descending order.

days  
 months  
 seasons  
 •                      *or*  
 seasons  
 months  
 days

The following references are *all* the verses from the Old Testament which use the term *Sabbath* and two or more of the *key terms* mentioned in Colossians 2:16. In each verse you can readily see “Sabbath” refers to the *weekly* Sabbath, *not* the *seasonal*, yearly Sabbath festivals.

Several of the following passages employ a typical Hebrew literary device known as parallelism. Note how the *new moon* is *equated* with the *weekly Sabbath*.

... Why will you go to him today? It is neither *new moon* nor *sabbath*.” (2 Ki. 4:23).

Thus says the Lord God, “The gate on the inner court facing east shall be shut the six working days; but it shall be opened on the *sabbath day*, and opened on the day of the *new moon*... The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the Lord on the *sabbaths* and on the *new moons*. And burnt offerings which the prince shall offer to the Lord on the *sabbath day* shall be six lambs... the grain offering with the lambs... a hin of oil... and on the day of the *new*



*moon . . . six lambs, a grain offering . . . a hin of oil . . .*" (Ez. 46:1,3,4–7).

When will the *new moon* be over so that we may buy grain, and the *sabbath*, that we may open the wheat market (Amos 8:5)?

"And it shall be from *new moon* to *new moon* and from *sabbath* to *sabbath*, all mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the Lord (Isa. 66:23).

In the following quotations carefully note that the seven *yearly sabbaths* are *never* called "sabbaths" but are *always* known by other terms such as "annual feasts," "fixed festivals," etc.

. . . and to offer all burnt offerings to the Lord, on the *sabbaths*, the *new moons* and the *fixed festivals* in the number set by the ordinance concerning them, continually before the Lord (1 Chron. 23:31).

. . . to burn fragrant incense before Him, and to set out the showbread continually, and to offer burnt offerings morning and evening, on *sabbaths* and on *new moons* and on the *appointed feasts* of the Lord our God, this being required forever in Israel (2 Chron. 2:4).

Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to the Lord . . . according to the daily rule, offering them up by the commandment of Moses, for the *sabbaths*, the *new moons*, and the three *annual feasts*—the *feast of unleavened bread*, the *feast of weeks*, and the *feast of tabernacles* (2 Chron. 8:12,13).

He also appointed the king's portion of his goods for the burnt offerings, namely, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the *sabbaths* and for the *new moons* and for the *fixed festivals*, as it is written in the law of the Lord (2 Chron. 31:3).

. . . for the continual burnt offering, the *sabbaths*, the *new moon*, for the *appointed times* . . . (Neh. 10:33).

Bring your worthless offerings no longer, their incense is an abomination to Me. *New moon* and *sabbath*, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your *new moon festivals* and your *appointed feasts*, they have become a burden to Me (Isa. 1:13,14).



Note the close parallel between the following two references and that of Colossians 2:16.

I will also put an end to all her gaiety, her *feasts*, her *new moons*, her *sabbaths* (Hos. 2:11).

And it shall be the prince's part to provide the burnt offerings, the *grain offerings* [food], and the *drink offerings* [drink], at the *feasts* [festival], on the *new moons*, and on the *sabbaths*, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel (Ez. 45:17).

## Conclusions

The evidence is weighted *heavily* in favor of interpreting "Sabbath day" in Colossians 2:16 as the *weekly Sabbath* for the following reasons:

First, in the immediate context of Colossians (2:11–13), Paul shows that Jesus *symbolically* fulfilled the one other sign of the old covenant, circumcision. Elsewhere (Gal. 5:1–6) Paul clearly states that this sign of the old covenant no longer applies to Christians, and he asserts that those who do practice it *for religious reasons* have fallen from grace! Logic would lead us to believe that if *one* of the signs of the old covenant was symbolically fulfilled by Christ and no longer applies, it is very likely the *other* sign of the old covenant (the seventh-day Sabbath) was also symbolically fulfilled by Christ and would no longer apply as a required practice. We will deal with the symbolic fulfillment of the Sabbath and the continuing sign of the new covenant in later chapters.

Second, in the Old Testament references which list the terms used in Colossians 2:16, "Sabbath(s)" *always* refers to the weekly Sabbath.

Third, when these terms are listed they are listed in either *ascending or descending order*. Thus, in Colossians 2:16 we find "festival (season), new moon (month), sabbath (day)." Since Paul is making use of an estab-



lished sequence of terms from the Old Testament, one would expect the meaning to be the same.

Fourth, in the Old Testament references which list the terms found in Colossians 2:16, the yearly sabbaths (Passover, Tabernacles, Day of Atonement, etc.) are *never* called “sabbaths” but *always* called “fixed festivals,” “appointed feasts,” “annual feasts,” etc. While some of the yearly “appointed feasts” are *elsewhere* said to be “a sabbath of rest” (Lev. 23), they are *not* called by the term “sabbaths,” probably to avoid confusion with the weekly Sabbath. For this reason the term “festival” in Colossians 2:16 *must* refer to the annual “sabbaths,” leaving the word “Sabbath day” for the weekly Sabbath.

Fifth, in the old covenant listing of the appointed times of the Lord, the seventh-day Sabbath is *closely associated* with new moons and the other items mentioned in Colossians 2:16 such as “food” and “drink.”

Sixth, to hold that “Sabbath(s)” in Colossians 2:16 *must* refer to yearly Sabbaths is *contrary* to the weight of evidence. It is also contrary to the immediate context where Paul is writing about the other sign of the old covenant: circumcision. It makes Paul’s writing redundant. One must interpret “festivals” as the yearly sabbaths, and then turn around and *also* interpret “Sabbath day” as the yearly sabbaths. It destroys the natural order which is so apparent in the other biblical listings of these terms. It is contrary to the unity of the old covenant, where everything in the old covenant is related to everything else within the old covenant.

### **Let no one judge you . . .**

To which group in Colossae did Paul write, “Let no one judge you”? From the context of Colossians it is my conclusion that the ones doing the judging were the very ones who were practicing the old covenant convocations and certain aberrations of Christianity. Therefore Paul



says to those who were being urged to practice these things,

... let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement . . . (Col. 2:16–18).

Some have argued that the “Sabbaths” in Colossians 2:16 were perversions of the weekly Sabbath.<sup>1</sup> However, the evidence is against this conclusion for several reasons. First, if the problem in Colossae were a perversion of the weekly Sabbath and Paul was seeking to correct this perversion he certainly missed his opportunity, for he never mentions anything about Sabbath reformation. Second, Paul states in the local context (Col. 2:17) that these old covenant convocations (festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths) were a *shadow* of things to come. It is clear he has reference to these convocations as pointing forward to Christ. If Paul were directing his comments to a *perversion* he could not at the same time call it a shadow of Christ.

## Implications

If we accept that the seventh-day Sabbath *is* intended by Paul in Colossians 2:16, then what is he saying and how does this affect those who continue to observe the seventh-day Sabbath as a necessary Christian duty?

First, Paul’s comments regarding the other convocations of the old covenant, such as new moon celebrations and the annual feasts, also apply to the seventh-day Sabbath. He, like the old covenant writers, considered *all* these convocations as *inseparable*. This is especially true since in verse 17 he says that these are a mere shadow and makes no distinction between the first two terms and the



third. The Greek, referring back to the three terms, literally reads, “which things are a shadow . . .”

Second, he tells the Christians they should allow no one to judge them regarding the Sabbath. The context makes it clear that Paul is against those who are trying to force the Colossians to keep the Sabbath and other old covenant convocations. They are to allow no one to make them feel guilty for *not* observing these.

Third, the observance of the Sabbath and other ceremonies in old covenant times was to point forward to Christ. They were a *mere shadow* of what was to come. As a shadow they lose their significance in the presence of the reality to which they pointed.

Fourth—and here is the heart of Paul’s argument in Colossians 2—*Any practice which seeks to add to the completeness the believer already has in Christ only undermines that relationship and the believer’s assurance.* “. . . Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:17). The Greek literally reads, “but the body is of the Christ.” Christ, and Christ alone, is the “body” in which dwells *our complete righteousness*. Any time the Christian seeks to add to that “body of righteousness,” he is saying that Christ’s righteousness is insufficient and he undermines his own standing with God! The good news of the gospel is that *we are complete in Him*.

### Galatians 4:8–11

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe *days* and *months* and *seasons* and *years*. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

To understand these verses correctly we must again see them in their context. The central issue in the book of Galatians is the old covenant law and its relationship to



righteousness for the Christian. There were some in the Galatian church who were teaching that Christians must observe the old covenant law.

Tell me, *you who want to be under law*, do you listen to the law (Gal. 4:21)?

Paul's answer to these false teachers is very clear. We will discuss more fully Paul's argument in relationship to the law in subsequent chapters, nevertheless for now note his clear, powerful statements regarding old covenant law.

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Gal. 3:24,25).

Paul likens the law to a tutor and then in the next verse says we are no longer under a tutor. Christians are no longer under old covenant law. Nothing could be stated more clearly.

With this context clearly in mind, look again at our passage.

### Days, months, seasons, and years

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the *weak and worthless elemental things*, to which you desire to be *enslaved* all over again? You observe *days* and *months* and *seasons* and *years*. I fear for you, that perhaps I have *labored over you in vain* (Gal. 4:9–11).

Notice that Paul again uses the term “elemental things.” This is a term he uses elsewhere to refer to old covenant law. What were the *days, months, seasons* and *years*? The central issue in the church of Galatia was the law and its relationship to righteousness for the Christian. Paul's opponents were seeking to persuade the Galatians to observe the law. This is what Paul is fighting. He shows that the observance of the law as a requirement puts



one under a curse for *any* failure to keep it perfectly. In the context of what was taking place in Galatia and with what we have learned from our study of Colossians 2:16, it should be clear that some of the Galatians had been persuaded by the Judaizers to observe the convocations of the old covenant. These days, months, seasons and years can be nothing other than Sabbaths (days), the new moon celebrations (months), the annual feasts (seasons) and sabbatical years (years). Notice these are listed in order as they are in Colossians and as they are in the Old Testament record.

## **Conclusion**

We have a clear reference to the seventh-day Sabbath in this passage for the following four reasons. (1) The context of the book of Galatians, including Chapter 4, is dealing with those “who want to be under law.” (2) Paul’s use of “elemental things” usually, if not always, refers to that which is contained in the old covenant. (3) The Galatians were observing days, months, seasons, and years, thus placing themselves back under old covenant law. (4) These convocations are listed in order.

## **Implications**

If we accept that the seventh-day Sabbath is here in view, what are the implications? There are many of deep significance. For the Christian, the Sabbath is “weak and worthless” (v. 9). For the Christian the Sabbath is enslaving (v. 9). For the Christian the observance of the Sabbath may undermine his standing in Christ. “I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain” (v. 11). For the Christian the Sabbath should be treated just like the new moons, the annual feasts, and the sabbatical years of Judaism—not practiced anymore.



We have studied Colossians 2 and Galatians 4; we now turn our attention to Romans 14.

### **Romans 14:5,6**

One man regards one day above another, another regards every day like. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

Are the “days” mentioned here Sabbath days? They could be, but the evidence is not as strong as it is for the passage in Galatians 4:10, and certainly not as strong as it is for Colossians 2:16.

### **A different method for a different church**

The context of this passage is *apparently* quite different from that in both Galatians and Colossians. However, it may not be as different as it first appears. Rather, what is different may be the way Paul is dealing with the situation. Galatia and Colossae were both largely Gentile churches. It is apparent, however, that some of these believers in Galatia and Colossae had strong Jewish-centered backgrounds. Many of them probably were “God-worshippers” before they became Christians. We noticed in our study of Acts that Paul’s evangelistic method was first to go to the synagogue to preach until he was thrown out, then he witnessed to the Gentiles. Because Paul followed this method it appears that many of the early Gentile converts to Christianity had strong old covenant backgrounds *because they were converted on the fringes of the synagogue*. This explains why, in writing to the Gentile churches, this old covenant background is so apparent.

When we come to the church at Rome, however, we have a different situation. In New Testament times more



Jews lived in Rome than in Jerusalem. Thus, when Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he was writing to a church which, although it had many Gentile converts, also had *many members who were from the Hebrew race and were converts from Judaism*.

Because of this Paul deals with nearly the same subject matter in the book of Romans—old covenant law—but uses a different method. His treatment of the old covenant law is much softer in Romans than in his letters to Gentile churches because many of his readers in Rome were Jewish nationals.

### Diversity in the New Testament church

It appears that the New Testament church was not as uniform in its practices and beliefs as some would like to think. From Acts 15 and 21 we can subdivide the New Testament church into four groups.

First, there were Jewish Christians who kept the old covenant laws *and insisted* that the Gentile Christians do the same.

Certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had *believed*, stood up, saying, “It is *necessary* to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:5).

Second, there were those who felt the Jewish Christians had to keep the old covenant laws, but the Gentile converts did not.

You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the *Jews* of those who have *believed*, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the *Jews* who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs . . . *But concerning the Gentiles* who have believed, we wrote, having decided [at the Jerusalem Council] that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from



blood and from what is strangled and from fornication (Acts 21:20,21,25).

Third, there were Gentile Christians who were seeking to keep the old covenant law. Paul wrote to these people in Colossae and Galatia.

Tell me, *you who want to be under law*, do you not listen to the law (Gal. 4:21)?

Fourth, there were Gentiles who did not keep the old covenant law.

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornications; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell (Acts 15:28,29).

All four of these groups can be found within the one Christian, New Testament church. They were all considered as “believers” but that does not mean they all had the right theology. Paul was in *sharp disagreement* with two groups—the first and third—but was much softer in his disagreement with the second group (Christians converted from Judaism) although his disagreement with them is decided and very clear.

### The church at Rome

The church at Rome, as stated before, was a mixed group made up of *many* Jewish Christians as well as Gentile Christians. Doubtless there were many disputes between these two groups. We can understand Paul’s treatment of law and observances in the book of Romans only with an understanding of this background.

Let us now come back to our passage in Romans 14. Paul is writing to this mixed church in Rome telling them to quit judging each other. In this chapter he mentioned several points of argument: There were those who ate “all



things” and others who ate “vegetables only” (v. 2). There were those who regarded some things as “unclean” and others who did not (vv. 14,20). There were those who drank wine and others who did not (v. 21). There were those who regarded and observed one day above another, and others who regarded every day alike (vv. 5,6).

It should be noted that Paul’s position on several of these arguments is clear even if his approach is tactful and diplomatic. He is *always* on the side of Christian liberty and he is *always against* those who would force certain observances. It is the man who is “weak in faith” that eats vegetables only (v. 2). Paul says,

I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean . . . All things indeed are clean (Rom. 14:14,20).

The Jewish Christians, with their background in the old covenant, doubtless were the ones who considered some foods unclean (Lev. 11). Yet Paul clearly says “All things indeed are clean” (Rom. 14:20), showing his disagreement with those who would enforce old covenant law on Christians.

The “days” mentioned in this chapter, that some “regard” and “observe” over other days, are *probably* Sabbath days, although the evidence is not conclusive. If, indeed, this passage does refer to Sabbath days then Paul simply says “let each man be fully convinced in His own mind” (v. 5). This is a much softer, gentler answer than he gave to the Colossians and Galatians. And we can see why. There were many Jewish Christians in the Roman church to which Paul was writing who still kept *many* of the old covenant regulations.

An alternate interpretation that is worthy of our attention has been suggested by Douglas R. de Lacey. He shows that some of the early Greek manuscripts have the



word “for” in verse 5. “*For* one man regards one day above another . . .” If one permits the “for” to have its full force

We need only allow that the “days” issue had arisen earlier in the history of the Roman church, and had already been solved. And it is not improbable that in such a cosmopolitan milieu this should have been the case. Paul will then be saying to the church that *just as* they accept differing practices over “days” *so also* they should entertain differing practices over “meats.” It is then easy to see why “days” form no further part of the discussion.<sup>2</sup>

This interpretation does not change the conclusion that for Paul the mixed body of Christians in Rome were free to decide for themselves regarding “days.”

## Conclusions

The “days” in Romans 14 probably refer to the Sabbath but we cannot be dogmatic in this conclusion.

## Implications

If one concludes that Paul is here referring to Sabbath days, what are the implications? Again, there are several. Sabbath observance is a matter of personal conviction. Church unity is more important than arguments over the Sabbath. Paul did not believe Sabbath observance, or nonobservance, was important in itself. There is evidence that Jewish Christians in Rome were the ones who were observing the Sabbath while the Gentile Christians there regarded “every day alike.”

## Paul’s Method of Evangelism

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law,



though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow-partaker of it (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

Paul's fundamental evangelistic method was to adapt his customs—even *religious practices*—to those for whom he was working. This method, I believe, gives considerable insight as to why we find Paul doing certain things which would otherwise seem to be contradictory to his own teaching.

Paul made some very straight and strong statements about Christians who received circumcision; however, *he* circumcised one of *his* Christian helpers.

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:2–4).

Paul wanted this man [Timothy] to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek (Acts 16:3).

Paul was not teaching one thing and doing another; rather, he was following a basic principle: do all things for the sake of the gospel. What Paul in essence said to the Galatians was that if they were circumcised *for religious reasons* it was an exercise in futility without giving the slightest advantage in regard to their relationship with Christ. Required circumcision *for Christians* implied that Christ's grace was insufficient for salvation. When Paul had Timothy circumcised it was *not* for religious reasons, rather it was because of the *prejudice of the Jews* who were in those parts.

The same principles are at work on several other



occasions in Paul's life. He told the Galatians *not* to observe days, months, seasons and years—the holy times of the old covenant—yet we see him “hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16). On another occasion Paul “had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow” (Acts 18:18). When returning to Jerusalem after his last missionary journey Paul and some of his friends

went into the Jewish temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until sacrifice was offered for each one of them (Acts 21:23–26).

It seems that Paul bent over backward to please the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem as well as in other parts of the world. Yet at the same time, he stood firmly on the premise that to observe the old covenant ceremonies *for religious reasons* was contrary to the Christian Gospel.

Paul instructed his pastors in training to

Shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless (Tit. 3:9).

Paul's method of evangelism explains *why* he went to the synagogues on the Sabbath. He was not keeping the Sabbath *for religious reasons*, rather

To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, *though not being myself under the Law*, that I might win those who are under the Law (1 Cor. 9:20).

Paul's method of evangelism and his instruction to the young Gentile churches seem at times to be contradictory. Yet upon careful study we see that he was guided *in both* by the new covenant law of love. He would allow nothing to separate the believer from the completeness he already had in Christ. Therefore we have his strong warnings against continued practice of old covenant convocations. However, his genuine love for his Jewish kinsmen caused



him to comply with old covenant practices when to do so would further the interests of the gospel. Here we see an illustration of how workable the new covenant really is. Rather than governed by large numbers of specific rules, as in the old covenant, Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit in applying the principle of love to God and love to man in *different ways for different situations*.

How does this relate to our study of the Sabbath? From these principles we must conclude that to observe the Sabbath for religious reasons as a *necessary* Christian duty, or as a *requirement of salvation*, seriously undermines one's standing in Christ. At the same time we are free to observe the Sabbath with those who are prejudiced regarding the Sabbath if our observance furthers the spread of the gospel.

### Chapter Summary

1. Unlike the book of Acts, the epistles contain explicit teaching regarding the Sabbath.
2. The evidence is heavily weighted in favor of understanding the "Sabbath day(s)" in Colossians 2:16 to be the seventh-day Sabbath.
3. There is strong evidence to believe that the "days" referred to in Galatians 4:10 refer to the seventh-day Sabbath.
4. There is some evidence to believe that the "days" in Romans 14:5,6 may refer to the seventh-day Sabbath.
5. In *every instance* in the epistles where there is *teaching about the Sabbath*, that teaching suggests that the Sabbath either undermines the Christian's standing in Christ, or is nonessential.
6. The Sabbath is linked with other old covenant convocations.
7. The implications for the continued observance of the Sabbath by Christians runs from unimportant—probably for the believing Jew—to a dangerous under-



mining of one's standing in Christ—for the believing Gentile.

8. The Sabbath is described by such terms as: “a mere shadow,” “elemental things,” “weak,” and “worthless.”
9. The Sabbath is said to be enslaving.
10. Observance of the Sabbath, and related old covenant convocations, made Paul “fear” that he had labored in vain.
11. The observance of the Sabbath by Christians seriously undermines the finished work of Christ.
12. It was Paul's stated and practiced method of evangelism to adapt his practices in order to break down prejudice and by so doing win more people to Christ.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> But what is clear is the fact that the Sabbath observance in the apostle's mind is that connected with the perversion, not the fulfillment of the fourth commandment. Desmond Ford, *The Forgotten Day*, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas R. de Lacey, *The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus*, in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, p. 182.



## Chapter 12

### NEW COVENANT DOCUMENTS AND SIGNS

It is now time to return to the new covenant and study it in greater depth. In Chapter 6 we gave a brief overview of this subject and covered two aspects of the new covenant. First, we found the New Testament defines the Sinaitic Covenant just the way the old covenant did: the Ten Commandments and the other laws which were an application and interpretation of the ten principles. The New Testament specifically mentions “the tables of the covenant” (Heb. 9:1–4), “Letters engraved on stones,” as referring to the “first” or “old” covenant.

Second, we saw that the old covenant, while being a revelation of truth, was very incomplete and fragmentary. The new covenant revelation of Jesus, on the other hand, is a “better” revelation because, unlike the laws of the old covenant, Jesus is the *radiance of God’s glory and He is the exact representation of God’s nature* (Heb. 1:1,2). Thus we concluded that if the two covenants were to come into conflict, the new covenant would *always* take precedence over the old.

#### Jesus, the new covenant

*Jesus is the new covenant.* He is The Elect of God. As we read in Isaiah 42:6, a prophecy of the coming Messiah, “*I will appoint you [The Messiah] as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations.*” “I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people” (Isa. 49:8). “For



on Him [Jesus] the Father, even God, has set His seal” (Jn. 6:27).

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as *He* is also the mediator of a *better covenant* which has been enacted on *better promises* (Heb. 8:6).

The old covenant partners were God and the “sons of Israel.” *The new covenant partners are the Father and Jesus.* Christ is the one who gave perfect obedience. We enter into that covenant by faith in Him. Over and over again we hear Jesus saying, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work” (Jn. 4:34). “I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (Jn. 5:30). “I have kept My Father’s commandments” (Jn. 15:10). On that Friday afternoon when our Covenant Keeper was dying on the cross for our sins, His last words were, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30). Just before these triumphant words we read these insightful remarks by the Gospel writer, “Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished . . .” (Jn. 19:28).

## Jesus only

In the old order of things at the very center of the camp of Israel was the tabernacle of the covenant, and in the center of the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant and in the ark of the covenant was the covenant and above the mercy seat was the shekinah glory. At the death of Christ, however, the old order of things came to an end.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mk. 15:37,38).

In the new order of things we see Jesus only.

Jesus is the way	Jn. 14:6
Jesus is the truth	Jn. 14:6
Jesus is the life	Jn. 14:6
Jesus is the Good Shepherd	Jn. 10:11,14



Jesus is the light	Jn. 8:12
Jesus is the door	Jn. 10:7
Jesus is the first	Rev. 22:13
Jesus is the last	Rev. 22:13
Jesus is the I AM <i>God</i>	Jn. 8:58
Jesus is the beloved Son	Jn. 3:16
Jesus is the bread of life	Jn. 6:48
Jesus is the water of life	Jn. 7:37,38
Jesus is the resurrection	Jn. 11:25
Jesus is the judge	Jn. 5:27

Throughout the Gospels the constant endeavor is to move the focus of the people away from Sinai to Jesus. Why? Because God no longer dwelt in the tent of the tabernacle of testimony (or the temple). He is tabernacling in the person of His Son, Jesus, and through His Son He dwells in the Christian.

The discerning reader of the New Testament will see a parallel between the life of Jesus, who is the new covenant, and certain things connected with the old covenant. In the parallel, however, there is also a contrast. Jesus is much, much better! Consider the following. *than the old*

Israel, as a nation, was born at the exodus from Egypt. Thus, we read of the birth of Jesus,

And he [Joseph] arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod; that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Out of Egypt did I call My Son" (Mt. 2:15).

In the old covenant God gave the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. In the new covenant Jesus went to the "Mount" and gave His people 10 blessings (Mt. 5:1-12). In the old covenant six of the Ten Commandments dealt with man's relation to man. It is no accident that Jesus quotes six of the old covenant laws, some from the Ten Commandments and some from the "book of the law"



and then says, “But I say to you . . .” In so doing *Jesus shows that He is the one who understands the true meaning of the old covenant law and He has authority over the old covenant law.*

1. You have heard that the ancients were told, “You shall not commit murder” . . . But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be guilty (Mt. 5:21,22).

2. You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery”; But I say to you, that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart (Mt. 5:27,28).

3. And it was said, “Whoever divorces his wife . . .” But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery (Mt. 5:31,32).

4. You have heard that the ancients were told, “You shall not make false vows . . .” But I say to you, make no oath at all (Mt. 5:33,34).

5. You have heard it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil (Mt. 5:38–42).

6. You have heard it was said, “You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies (Mt. 5:43–47).

What is Jesus doing here? He is showing that He, as the Messiah and Son of God, *has authority over the law and can interpret (or even change) it at will.*

The account of the woman who was caught in adultery as recorded in John 8 is full of insights for the discerning reader.

Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say? . . . But Jesus stooped down, and with His *finger wrote* on the ground . . . He straightened up, and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a



stone at her." *And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground* (Jn. 8:4–8).

In the old covenant we read of God writing with His finger two times. Now Jesus writes with His finger two times, showing that it is now *His word* which is normative. No longer are the people to look to *Sinai* for guidance, but to *Him*.

What does the experience on the mount of transfiguration teach?

And He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And *Elijah* appeared to them along with *Moses*; and they were conversing with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles [sacred tents], one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "*This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!*" And all at once they looked around and *saw no one with them any more, except Jesus only* (Mk. 9:3–8).

Peter volunteered to make *three* "sacred tents," one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus. By making this suggestion Peter was unconsciously making Jesus equal with the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). But suddenly a cloud shuts out Moses and Elijah, the voice of God booms forth—He will have no one equal with His son!—"This is My beloved Son, *listen to Him!*" Then they saw no one but *Jesus only!* While the event of the transfiguration may include other insights, the revelation of the superiority of Jesus over the law and prophets is certainly the central theme.

There is no end of illustrations that could be given to show that Jesus, and Jesus only, is the center of new covenant truth. He far supersedes the shadowy revelation which lighted the pathways of old covenant history. The



underlying motif of all of the controversies Jesus had with the Jewish leaders had to do with who He was and the authority of His word and actions in relationship with the old covenant law and the accepted interpretation of those laws. “Unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24).

### New covenant law

Because Jesus is the Elect of God; because He is God’s final revelation to man; because He is the exact representation of God’s nature; because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; because He is the Light of the world; because He always did the Father’s will; because He never did anything but what the Father was doing—because of these things He, Himself, becomes the basis for new covenant law. “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (Jn. 8:31). “If anyone keeps *My word* he shall never see death” (Jn. 8:51).

*12:47 was omitted - I do not judge him - - -*  
 A I have come as the light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness . . . He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me *has given Me commandment, and what to say, and what to speak.* And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me (Jn. 12:46–50).

### The words of the covenant

As we saw in our study of the old covenant, the Ten Commandments were the words of the covenant. There was also an expanded version of the covenant: the laws of Exodus through Deuteronomy. We also saw that the covenant’s ongoing sign was the Sabbath. What is the new covenant law or commandment?



*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn. 13:34,35).*

*Part of this “new commandment” was not new. The old covenant had instructed them to love one another. The part that was new was “as I have loved you.” And as we see the way that Jesus loved those dull, slow to learn, stumbling, sleeping, denying, and forsaking disciples, we indeed have a new commandment!* *most are slow to us*

In the old covenant what made others know the Israelites were the chosen people? Not the way they loved, but what they ate and what they did not eat; where they worshipped, when they worshipped, the clothes they wore, etc. However, in the new covenant, Christ’s true disciples will be known by the way they love!

This commandment to love is repeated a number of times in the New Testament, just as the Ten Commandments were repeated a number of times in the old.

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (Jn. 14:15). He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him (Jn. 14:21). If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love . . . *This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you (Jn. 15:10–12).*

You are My friends, if you do what I command you (Jn. 15:14). *This I command you, that you love one another (Jn. 15:17). And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us (1 Jn. 3:23). And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loved God should love his brother also (1 Jn. 4:21).*

## **The Book of the Covenant: the New Testament**

As the old covenant had an expanded version of the Ten



Commandments known as the book of the law, so the new covenant contains more than just the simple command to love one another as Christ loved us. We have the Gospel records which demonstrate how Jesus loved. We have in these records the additional words of Christ. Then, in the epistles we have interpretations of the love and work of Christ. Like the old covenant, some of the interpretations of the covenant are moral and eternal and some are specifically set forth for the culture in which the writers lived.

The epistles interpret and apply the meaning of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and this application is valid for all peoples and time. They also contain instructions which are clearly intended for a specific culture, time and place. An example of specific, cultural application is Paul's instruction to women regarding covering their heads.

For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head (1 Cor. 11:6).

To understand these instructions we must see them in their cultural setting. The city of Corinth was well known for its abundance of temple prostitutes. They were the ones who had uncovered or shaved heads. Therefore, while the specifics of Paul's instructions apply only to his culture, we can apply the underlying principle and request that women not come to church looking like prostitutes—however prostitutes look in our culture.

So the core, or heart, of the new covenant is to love one another as Christ loved us. This is expanded and interpreted in the rest of the New Testament, and also becomes part of the new covenant.

### **New covenant signs**

The entrance sign to the old covenant was circumcision,



and the continuing, repeatable sign Israel was to “remember” was the Sabbath. What are the signs of the new covenant?

The entrance sign of the new covenant is baptism. When Jesus was explaining the way of salvation to Nicodemus He said,

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again” (Jn. 3:5–7).

When Jesus came to John the Baptist, John said,

I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me? But Jesus answering said to him, “permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:14,15).

The discerning reader may see in this incident reflections of an Old Testament event. When Moses was on the way to Egypt to deliver Israel, he was met by the Lord who “sought to put him to death” because his sons were uncircumcised. Quickly the rite of circumcision was performed and the Lord then permitted him to continue His mission of deliverance (Ex. 4:24–26). So in the new covenant when Jesus is on His way—starting His ministry—he accepts the sign of the new covenant, baptism, and then goes on to deliver “Israel.”

In the great commission passage in Matthew 28:19 we read,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

The following illustration will help show how this passage is constructed in Greek.



Go therefore and make disciples of all nations:

1. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
2. Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;

And lo,

I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

The way disciples were made was *first* to baptize them, *then* teach them to observe all that Jesus taught—how to love as He loved.

We find the same order in the old covenant. The people of Israel were first to be circumcised and then, as members of the covenant community, they were to receive ongoing instruction.

It is of interest to note that *every time* the New Testament uses the words “into Christ” it is in connection with baptism.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been *baptized into Christ Jesus* have been *baptized into His death* (Rom. 6:3)?

For all of you who were *baptized into Christ* have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:27). .

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands . . . having been buried with Him in baptism (Col. 2:11,12).

For by one Spirit we were all *baptized into one body* (1 Cor. 12:13).

Baptism fills the place in the new covenant that circumcision filled in the old. It is the entrance sign or ceremony into the covenant community.

Having shown this, we must also remember that



baptism *per se* does not have effective force. We are not saved *by baptism*, rather we are saved by belief in Christ. Baptism is the outward sign that we have committed ourselves to Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

What is the continuing, repeatable sign of the New Testament that we are to “remember”?

And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood *of the covenant*, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins” (Mt. 26:26–28).

Do this in *remembrance of Me* . . . This cup which is poured out for you is the *new covenant* in My blood (Lk. 22:19,20).

While there is yet much to discuss regarding the new covenant and its relation to the old which will shed light on our study of the Sabbath, nevertheless we are ready for the following comparisons:

**The old covenant:**

**The new covenant:**

*Covenant partners*

God and Israel

The Father and Jesus

*Words of the covenant*

Ten Commandments

Love as Christ loved

*Book of the covenant*

Exodus to Deuteronomy

Gospels and Epistles

*Entrance sign*

Circumcision

Baptism

*Remembrance sign*

Sabbath

The Lord’s Supper



## Law and Spirit

At this juncture we need to understand the central role the Holy Spirit plays in the new covenant. Without this insight we will be left with nagging questions. Without His infilling, we will be left longing for Sinai! When Jesus entered His ministry as the Covenant Messenger He was baptized in water by John and

While He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove (Lk. 3:21,22).

He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire (Lk. 3:16).

From that point on we see Jesus being led by the Spirit and demonstrating all the gifts of the Spirit!

*Jesus full of the Holy Spirit . . . was led about by the Spirit* (Lk. 4:1). And Jesus returned to Galilee *in the power of the Spirit* (Lk. 4:14). *The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me* (Lk. 4:18).

After the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost we see the central role the Spirit played in the church, God's new covenant people. In Peter's sermon he quotes Joel and says,

It shall be in the last days, God says, that *I will pour forth of My spirit upon all mankind*; and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:17,18).

Peter told the people,

Repent and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and *you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all those who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself* (Acts 2:38,39).



The history of the new covenant church is a history of the working of the Holy Spirit. "Filled with the Holy Spirit," they began "to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). The deacons were "full of the Holy Spirit" and they did "great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:3,8). "The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot'" (Acts 8:29). "The Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away" (Acts 8:39). Ananias laid His hand upon Saul and he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). The disciples were comforted by the Spirit (Acts 9:31). By the Spirit they foretold coming events (Acts 11:28). The Spirit spoke to the church (Acts 13:4). Paul was "sent out by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:4). They were filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52). By the power of the Holy Spirit the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were cast out and the power of the enemy was broken.

An accurate knowledge of the role of the Holy Spirit is fundamental for a correct understanding of the new covenant and it is also necessary for a right interpretation of the Sabbath. *The role the law filled in the old covenant is filled by the Holy Spirit in the new.* Scripture compares and contrasts the law with the Spirit in many ways. A subtle example of this is seen in the events surrounding the giving of both covenants. After the law was given the children of Israel immediately went into disobedience and fell under condemnation. They made a golden calf, worshipped it, sacrificed to it, and said, "This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:8). Because of this sin "*about three thousand men of the people fell that day*" (Ex. 32:28). These three thousand were killed by their brothers at the command of God.

At the giving of the Spirit in the new covenant, on the other hand, we find better news! "*There were added that day about three thousand souls*" (Acts 2:41). I believe



these numbers are recorded to point out the contrasting nature of the two covenants and show the relationship between the law and the Spirit.

Notice thoughtfully how the Holy Spirit takes the place of the law in Paul's comparisons and contrasts between the old and new covenants in 2 Cor. 3:3–18.

**The old covenant:**

Written with ink

On tablets of stone

Not of the letter

The letter kills

Ministry of death

Ministry of condemnation

Came with glory

Now has no glory

**The new covenant:**

Written with the Spirit

On tablets of the heart

But of the Spirit

The Spirit gives life

Ministry of the Spirit

Ministry of righteousness

Abounds in glory

Glory remains

Unless the new covenant Christian understands *and experiences* the role of the Holy Spirit he will long for Sinai. It is only the indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit that can write the new covenant law of love on our hearts so that we have an ever-present Person who will teach us all things (Jn. 14:26), guide us into all truth (Jn. 16:13), and testify to us of Christ (Jn. 15:26). The old covenant law was external—written on stone. The new covenant law is internal—written on our hearts. *The new covenant Lawgiver is present in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.*

If anyone loves Me he will keep my word; and My Father will love Him, and *We will come to him, and make Our abode with him* (Jn. 14:23).

Does this mean that the new covenant Christian is to throw out the objective truth of Scripture for the subjective guidance of the Holy Spirit? Never! But what it does



mean is that in addition to the “*logos*” (objective written word of Scripture) the Spirit-filled Christian also has the “*rehma*” (the present speaking word of God) to help him interpret the *logos*, apply it to his specific situation and, if necessary, even to give supernatural guidance.

Today the church has, to a large degree, bought into the western world view, which eliminates the supernatural. That is *not* the view of Scripture. The book of Acts, as well as the whole of Scripture, is filled with the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. It is my belief that the New Testament Christian who rejects the present-day “gifting” of the Holy Spirit is not experiencing the fullness of new covenant life: a personal relationship with the indwelling Christ

who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, *according to the power that works within us* (Eph. 3:20).

### Chapter Summary

1. The center of the new covenant is in the person of Jesus.
2. Because of who Jesus is (God tabernacling in the flesh), His revelation of truth greatly supersedes that given in the old covenant.
3. The sermon on the mount shows that Jesus’ authority is greater than that of the old covenant.
4. The experience of the transfiguration teaches that God does not want His Son put on an equality with the old covenant. We are to see “Jesus only.”
5. The new covenant in summary form is: “And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.”
  - a. Our duty to God is to believe in Jesus.
  - b. Our duty to man is to love as God loved us.
6. The new covenant, in expanded form, is recorded in



the gospels and epistles. These interpret and apply the basic message of belief in Christ and love for our fellow men.

7. The entrance sign in the new covenant is water baptism and the sealing of the Holy Spirit.
8. In the new covenant the Christian is to “remember” the continuing sign of the Lord’s supper.
9. In the new covenant the Holy Spirit plays much the same role as did the law in the old covenant.



## Chapter 13

### A BETTER LAW

#### A Better Covenant

In this section we come to the heart of the new covenant.

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry by as much as He is also the mediator of a *better covenant* which has been enacted on *better promises*. For if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them [the sons of Israel] . . . I will effect a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; *not like* the covenant which I made with their fathers (Heb. 8:6–10).

Now comes the essence of what the new covenant is to be:

First,

I will put My laws into their minds. And I will write them upon their hearts (Heb. 8:10). *Jer. 31-33*

How is this done?

Written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3:3).

Second,

And they shall not teach every one his fellow citizen . . . For all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them (Heb. 8:11). *Jer 31:33*

Here, in stark contrast to the old covenant where only



the key leaders such as Moses, Joshua, David, etc., were filled with the Spirit and had a personal relationship with God, under the new and better covenant everyone is to have a personal knowledge of God, and thus be taught personally by Him. In the old covenant the people said to Moses,

Speak to us yourself and we will listen, but let not God speak to us, lest we die (Ex. 20:19).

In the new, better covenant everyone is to know the Lord personally.

Third,

*For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more* (Heb. 8:12).

*Der 31-39*  
Here we have one foundational truth expressed in two ways: God is going to be *merciful* regarding our sins. While we certainly see God's mercy in the old covenant, we also see him dealing justly with sinners. Note the threatened results if Israel disobeyed. Witness also what happened to Israel when they did disobey.

But it shall come about, if you will not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. (Deut. 28:15-20).

The new covenant is much, much better than the old. While in the old covenant we see God's mercy time and again, nevertheless, complete forgiveness was only typi-



## ***A Better Law***

fied, as Christ had not yet died for the sins of the world. In the new covenant God *really* deals with grace and mercy, and Christ, as our substitute and surety, fulfills the covenant stipulations for us. This will be discussed further in a later chapter.

Another way of saying the same truth is that God will *not remember our sins*. In Scripture when we read of God “remembering” it is often associated with impending action. When God “remembered” Rachel she conceived and bore a son (Gen. 30:22). When God “remembered” His covenant He took action to deliver Israel (Ex. 2:24; 3:8). So when we read in the new and better covenant that God is not going to “remember” our sins, the underlying concept is that He is *not* going to take action regarding our sins! Why?

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

The following chart contrasts the old and new covenants on these three items:

### **Old covenant:**

### **New covenant:**

Laws written on stone

Laws written on heart

Only leaders knew God

All personally know God

Sinners punished

Christ suffered on our behalf

### **General principles**

The new covenant has general principles rather than detailed laws. Hebrews 8:9 says the new covenant is *not* like the old. In the old we saw that everything was spelled out in minute detail as if it were given to children. However, the new covenant is set forth as given to “sons” who know what their Father is doing.

Springing from this intimate friendship where all know the Lord, we find a completely different style in the new



covenant. In the old covenant the laws regarding the showbread were set forth as follows.

You shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. And you shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the pure gold table before the Lord (Lev. 24:5,6).

When we come to the new covenant all we have is,

As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you show the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:26).

There is no recipe telling us how to make communion bread, no instruction regarding what kind of plate to use. We are not even told how often to practice it. Rather, the new covenant deals with the heart and central issues in general principles giving us the freedom to be guided by the Holy Spirit to find an appropriate recipe, plate and time.

The following chart illustrates this principle:

OC = old covenant

NC = new covenant

OC. Showbread: detailed recipe, how to arrange it, what kind of plate to use, when to put it out, etc. (Lev. 24:5,6).

NC. Communion bread: no recipe, no directions other than "... When He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me'" (1 Cor. 11:24,25).

OC. When to worship: Sabbaths, new moons, fixed festivals, etc. (Lev. 23).

NC. When to worship: not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together (Heb. 10:25). Continually offer up a sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15).

OC. Where to worship: tabernacle (temple in Jerusalem) (Jn. 4:20).



NC. Where to worship: Where two or three are gathered together (Mt. 18:20).

OC. How to worship: as prescribed by the law.

NC. How to worship: in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24).

OC. What to bring: one male goat and two male lambs (Lev. 23:19).

NC. What to bring: present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

This list could go on and on, but the point is clear. The old covenant is characterized by *great detail*. In contrast the new covenant is presented in *general principles*.

### **A covenant of grace**

While the old covenant made provision for forgiveness and grace was present, nevertheless its focus was law. In contrast, while the new covenant has laws, its focus is on grace.

### **A personal covenant**

In the old covenant only the key leaders were filled with the Holy Spirit and had a *personal* knowledge of God. However, in the new covenant *all* are to know God personally and be taught by Him.

### **A covenant for all nations**

The old covenant was limited to the “sons of Israel” and those who would “join themselves to the Lord” by being circumcised, keeping the Sabbath and thus coming under the Torah. By contrast the new covenant is good news for all the nations. Whosoever will may come. All may join the new covenant community by believing in Jesus, demonstrating this belief by being baptized and observing the Lord’s Supper.



### A Better Law

Now we are ready for the heavyweight and often misunderstood truth of the New Testament: Christians are no longer under old covenant law. This truth is, on the one hand, one of the *most dangerous* revelations within the new covenant in that it has been misunderstood, misapplied, and used as a cover for sin. On the other hand, understood in its fullness, it is one of the *most rewarding, refreshing and workable truths*. Let us carefully examine Scripture on this topic. Let us not try to explain away anything trying to make it fit our theology, rather let us accept each statement for what it teaches and fit our theology to match Scripture.

It is important to recognize that not all passages of Scripture have equal teaching authority. We sometimes say that certain passages may teach by their silence. For example, the Sabbath is never mentioned in Scripture until after the Exodus. This silence has some, but very little, teaching authority. Then there are passages in either highly symbolic or poetic language. These passages have some authority: more than silence, but less than contextual teaching. There are also passages which refer to a subject matter in passing, but the context deals with other subject matter. An illustration of this was seen in the chapter on the Sabbath in Acts. Nothing was *taught* regarding the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was mentioned in connection with Paul's evangelistic method of first preaching Christ to those attending the Jewish synagogue. This type of reference has some teaching authority: more than silence, but less than contextual teaching. The very highest teaching authority is when a passage expressly teaches something on a given subject and the context of that passage is dealing with that subject.



## Hebrews

The book of Hebrews was written to converted Jews who had been members of the old covenant community. The contextual teaching of this book deals with the very point of our study: how Christians were to relate to old covenant law. Therefore, we should accept the following statements as having the highest teaching authority. After the writer of Hebrews has shown the three fundamental aspects of the new covenant (Heb. 8:6–12) he adds,

When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear (Heb. 8:13).

A literal translation from the Greek would be, “In saying ‘new’ he has made old the first; but that which grows old and aged is near disappearing.” With the coming of the new covenant the “first covenant” grows old and aged and is near disappearing. The New Testament defines the old covenant as the Ten Commandments and the other laws in the books of Moses. But can we be sure that is what the author here has in mind?

The very next verses make it clear. “Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship [Greek word is service]” (Heb. 9:1). It is unquestionably clear that the Sabbath was one of those regulations of divine worship or service (Lev. 23). Following this reference the author of Hebrews lists other aspects of the “first covenant,” then in verse 4 he lists “*the tables of the covenant.*” Let me clarify by reviewing what is said here. First, our author calls the Sinaitic Covenant the “first covenant” (called old in other places). Then he says it had regulations for divine worship. He goes on to list the things included in this “first covenant,” including “the tables of the covenant”—a clear reference to the Ten Commandments. These are facts of Scripture in their contextual setting.



Thus the “tables of the covenant,” which include the Sabbath commandment, and the “laws for divine worship,” which include the Sabbath, are old and ready to disappear.

In Hebrews 9:4–10 the author continues to describe aspects of old covenant worship and then in verse 10 states that these were “imposed *until* a time of reformation.” What is that “time of reformation”? The next verse tells us, “But *when Christ appeared*” (Heb. 9:11).

## Galatians

The book of Galatians teaches the same thing. Remember that the book of Galatians was written to those who had been misled by the Judaizing teachers and who *wanted to be under law* (Gal. 4:21). The context deals expressly with our subject matter. Therefore, it, too, has the highest teaching authority. In Galatians 3:17 Paul states that the Law “came four hundred and thirty years” *after* the promise to Abraham. Thus, Paul agrees with the old covenant record that this covenant “was not made with the fathers” (Deut. 5:3). In answer to “Why the Law?” Paul says, “It was added because of transgressions . . . until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made” (Gal. 3:19). Verse 16 defines this “seed” as Christ.

Paul continues,

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore, *the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ*, that we may be justified by faith. But *now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor* (Gal. 3:22).

Here, in contextual teaching, Paul calls the law our tutor, then says we are no longer under a tutor. In other words he is saying that *the old covenant law no longer has*



authority over the life of a Christian. But can we be sure this is what Paul really means? Yes. Note carefully his powerful allegory.

Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This contains an allegory: for *these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.* Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother . . . And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? *Cast out the bondwoman and her son,* for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, *we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman* (Gal. 4: 21–31).

The following chart will help us understand this passage:

**Hagar = old covenant**  
 Sinai-Jerusalem  
 Son of the bondwoman  
 Born of flesh  
 In slavery  
 Persecuting  
 (Like Ishmael)  
 Born according to flesh

**Sarah = new covenant**  
 The Jerusalem above  
 Son of the free woman  
 Born of promise  
 In freedom  
 Persecuted  
 Like Isaac  
 Born according to Spirit

Now here is the punch line. What are the “children of Isaac” (Christians) to do when the “Sons of the bondwoman” (Judaizers), “persecute” (force old covenant laws on Christians)? The answer is “*Cast out the bondwoman and her son.*” The “bondwoman” is the old



covenant. “Her son” represents those who force old covenant laws upon Christians. Here, in clear contextual teaching over several chapters, Paul states in three specific ways that Christians are not under the authority of the old covenant. (1) The law was given 430 years after Abraham *until* the coming of Christ. (2) With the coming of Christ we are no longer *under* the Law. (3) Christians are to “*cast out*” the old covenant and those who promote its being kept.

## Romans

In the book of Romans Paul teaches that Christians are not under old covenant law. He does this, however, in a kinder, gentler way, and in so doing we learn additional insights which we would otherwise miss. As we pointed out in Chapter 11, the church at Rome was a mixed church containing Christians from both Judaistic and Gentile backgrounds. Throughout this book Paul addresses one group and then the other. In Romans 1:16 Paul says,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the *Jew* first and also to the *Greek*.

Paul shows in the remaining verses of Chapter 1 that the *Gentiles* are under condemnation because they did not honor God even though they knew about Him from natural revelation.

In Chapter 2 Paul addresses his *Jewish* readers. He concludes that the Jews are under condemnation because even though they had the law they did not keep it.

In Chapter 3 Paul shows that *all* have sinned. Then he says,

But now *apart from the Law* the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for *there is no*



*distinction*; for all have sinned and [continue to] fall short of the glory of God being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:21–24).

At this point Paul's Jewish readers are about to quit reading and rebel at his teaching. They feel he is putting the lawless Gentiles on the same level as the Jews who have the law of God. Therefore he quickly adds,

Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, *we establish the Law* (Rom. 3:31).

Now Paul must show *from the law* how the Gentiles can be saved *without the law*. Notice carefully his reasoning.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness . . . How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, *that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that the righteousness might be reckoned to them . . .* For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, *in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all* (Rom. 4:1–5, 10, 11, 16).

In these verses Paul shows how the promise of righteousness by faith was made to Abraham *before* he was circumcised. Then he shows that *both* the Jews and the Gentiles are included in this promise. The Jews are



descendants of Abraham and experienced living *under the law*, yet that experience did not bring them into the righteousness which is by faith. The Gentiles, on the other hand, did *not* experience living under the law and came directly into the righteousness which is by faith when they believed in Christ. In other words, Paul says the believing Gentiles experienced the righteousness which is by faith, completely *bypassing Sinai and all old covenant law*.

In Chapter 5 Paul explains the meaning and results of righteousness by faith and then says,

The Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20).

In Chapter 6 Paul shows that the believing Christian is free from the controlling power of sin.

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus . . . But now *having been freed from sin* and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life (Rom. 6:11,22).

In Chapter 7 Paul shows that *Jewish Christians* are free from the law.

Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of



our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been *released from the Law*, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we *serve* in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter (Rom. 7:1–6).

It is important to note that Paul is *not* speaking about the *condemnation* of the law, from which the Christian is also free, but rather he is speaking about Christian *service*. In other words Paul is telling the Jewish Christians in Rome that the law no longer serves as a guideline for Christian living. Notice also how Christians serve in the *newness of the Spirit*, a clear reference to the new covenant, in contrast to *the oldness of the letter*, a clear reference to the Sinaitic Covenant.

This sounded like heresy to the Jewish Christians in Paul's day and it also sounds like heresy to many Christians today. Nevertheless we must take Paul at his word and let him explain what he means. To answer the questions which would immediately come to his readers' minds Paul quickly adds,

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "*You shall not covet.*" But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead (Rom. 7:7,8).

In Romans 7:9–25 Paul illustrates what life is like when one serves God *from the perspective of the Sinaitic Covenant*. The reader is encouraged to read these verses. In summary Paul shows that one may try as hard as possible to live in conformity to the law but it is impossible to meet the full demands of the law. There is a continuous struggle between indwelling sin and the requirements of the law.

Again it is important that we not forget the major thesis of this chapter: *Christians are released from the law as a guide for Christian service*. We know that Paul uses



“law” to refer to the old covenant law, including the Ten Commandments, as he specifically mentions “You shall not covet.”

In Romans 8, by contrast, Paul illustrates what life is like when one serves God *from the perspective of the new covenant*.

There is therefore *now no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [new covenant] has set you free from the law of sin and death [old covenant]. For what the Law [old covenant] could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: [new covenant] sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that *the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit* (Rom. 8:1–5).

Here Paul shows that under the dynamics of the new covenant the believer actually attains “the requirement of the law.” At first this appears to be a contradiction to what Paul said in Romans 7—that a Christian is released from old covenant law *as a guide for Christian service*. Harmony comes, however, when we correctly understand what Paul means by “the requirement of the law.” The old covenant law was designed to bring Israel into fellowship with God. The law served to provide a basis of fellowship between the sons of Israel and YHWH. Its underlying goal was to keep man from sinning and help him develop sufficient righteousness for this fellowship. However, the history of Israel shows this arrangement did not work very well. The old covenant arrangement fell short in at least *four* ways, *all* of which were an outgrowth of *man’s weakness*, “Weak as it was *through the flesh*” (Rom. 8:3), “for finding fault with *them*” (Heb. 8:6). The first weakness of the old covenant is demonstrated by the history of Israel. *They* did not keep the covenant. Second, God chose to make the old covenant a covenant of great



detail. Because of *Israel's weakness* God gave them a list of do's and don'ts. Because of the minutiae of detail contained in the old covenant the *sons of Israel* stumbled as they applied the specifics of these laws to their real-life experiences. A third shortcoming of the old covenant was that God limited His revelation of truth *because of their weakness*. The old covenant revelation, as we saw in Chapters 5 and 12, was fragmentary and incomplete. It was only a shadow of good things to come. A fourth deficiency of the old covenant was that it did not provide *real* freedom from sin.

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? . . . It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb. 10:1,2,4).

Paul's argument in Romans 8 is that "the requirement of the law" can be fulfilled *only* within the arrangements of the new covenant. He is *not* seeking to place Christians back under the old covenant law. Rather, he is showing that under the new covenant, where the Christian "walks according to the Spirit" the underlying purpose of the covenant, which is fellowship with God, is achieved.

In the new covenant the Spirit of God indwells the believer (Rom. 8:8–11). In the new covenant God's requirements are given in basic principles, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12). Paul adds, "Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10). In contrast to the shadowy nature of the old covenant, the new comes in the radiance of God's glory (Heb. 1:2). In the new covenant sins are *really forgiven*, "Having been freed from sin"



(Rom. 6:22). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

It is only under this arrangement that *true fellowship between man and God can develop*. Paul can say that the "*requirement of the law*" is fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). Therefore the Christian living under the new covenant may experience a fellowship with God which was not possible under the old covenant.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God these are *the sons of God*. For you have *not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again*, but you have received a *spirit of adoption* as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! [Daddy] Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that *we are children of God*, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and *fellow heirs with Christ* . . . (Rom. 8:14–17).

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the *love of God*, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38,39).

In the next few chapters Paul deals with the failure of Israel and then in Chapter 10 he says,

For Christ is the *end of the law* for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).

With the explanation Paul has now given, he can repeat what he said in Chapter 3 without losing his Jewish readers. Thus he says,

For there is *no distinction* between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him (Rom. 10:12).

In summary Paul shows in his letter to the Romans that the Gentiles can come within the promised blessing of righteousness by faith given to Abraham by completely *bypassing the Sinaitic Covenant and all of its laws*. He



does this without nullifying the law (Rom. 3:31). Rather he *uses the law* to prove this. Secondly, he shows that Jewish Christians have been *released from the law as a guide for Christian service*. He does this by showing the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7:12), but shows how the law no longer applies to one who has died with Christ (Rom. 7:4–6). Thirdly, he shows that the underlying purpose of the old covenant—to establish relationship between God and man—can be fulfilled under the new covenant *only* by the Christian who *walks by the Spirit*. For this reason Paul concludes that “*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*” (Rom. 10:4). He can say without hesitation or misunderstanding “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek” (Rom. 10:12).

## Ephesians

When writing to the church in Ephesus, which was probably composed mostly of converted Gentiles, Paul again shows that the Christian is not under old covenant law. He starts by reminding the Gentiles of their lost condition before they believed in Christ.

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, *by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances*, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity (Eph. 2:12–16).

Here Paul says Christ abolished the enmity that existed between Jews and Gentiles. He defines this “enmity” as



“the law of commandments contained in ordinances.” The Greek simply says, “the law of commandments in decrees.” The two main points of separation between Jew and Gentile were first *circumcision* and second the *Sabbath*. (See Ex. 12:48; Ex. 31:12–17; Isa. 56:3–6).

## Philippians

The church in Philippi was a favorite with Paul. These Christians had accepted the Gospel and demonstrated their love by supporting Paul’s ministry on more than one occasion. Yet even this church was bothered by those who wanted to enforce old covenant laws upon Christians. Paul’s counsel to them is full of insight.

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more; circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. *But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.* More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, *not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ*, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil. 3:2–9).

In this one sweeping, majestic statement Paul clearly shows the weakness of old covenant law and the surpassing value of the new covenant. In doing so He shows the very essence of what the covenant was intended to do: provide relationship between man and God. He speaks of the surpassing value of “*knowing* Christ Jesus



my Lord.” He rejoices knowing that he has *gained Christ* and is now “*found in Him.*” He exalts in “*the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.*” He clearly points out that this righteousness is *not* “derived from the law.”

## Colossians

In Chapter 11 we studied Colossians in relationship to the Sabbath. A quick review shows that this letter agrees with the other epistles in its treatment of law.

Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Col. 2:14).

In summarizing this section, Scripture clearly states in a number of places through contextual teaching that the old covenant law, including the Ten Commandments and the regulations for divine worship, is obsolete, ready to disappear, and should be cast out. It clearly shows that the Gentiles do not come under Sinaitic law and that even Jewish Christians have been released from the law as a guide for Christian living. However, as soon as we speak about casting out the old covenant, the words of which include the Ten Commandments, many questions come to mind. Are we saying that the moral laws of the Ten Commandments are no longer binding? Under the new covenant is it permissible to kill, steal and commit adultery? These questions deserve thorough answers.

## The Ten Commandments

For many the Ten Commandments are seen to be the very high point of God’s revelation of truth. This law has been the foundation of civilized society. When society has transgressed this law it has reaped the bitter consequences. How then can the new covenant speak of not



being under this law written with the very finger of God?

It is my prayer that what follows may bring harmony to the clear statements of Scripture which declare the Ten Commandments are no longer binding upon Christians, and yet maintain the moral principles upon which they are based.

We have already shown that one cannot divide the old covenant into the two subdivisions of moral and ceremonial. It simply will not work. I believe the following subdivisions make more sense and harmonize with Scripture.

### *Old covenant*

1. *Moral laws*: These laws would include all the moral laws within the Ten Commandments, and many other moral laws in the "book of the law." Moral is here defined as that which in itself has *intrinsic value* in man's relationship with man, or man's relationship with God.
2. *Gospel shadows*: These laws include the laws and ceremonies which in some way pointed forward to, and were fulfilled by Christ. In this group would be the morning and evening sacrifice, the various sacrifices for sin, the tabernacle, the candlestick, the showbread, the laver, etc., and in Chapter 15 we will find the Sabbath fits here as well.
3. *Covenant signs*: circumcision and Sabbath.
4. *Civil laws*: These laws include the many instructions given to Israel living under a theocracy and include interpretations and applications of these laws to the specific time and culture. In this group would be those laws which dealt with slavery, divorce, retaliation, etc.

### *New covenant*

1. *Moral principles*: All the moral laws of the old covenant would be included here *but not in old covenant*



*form.* Instead of volumes of detailed laws the new covenant gives a few basic principles falling under the one chief moral commandment of “you shall love one another as I have loved you.” Therefore Paul could say,

For he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet.” and if there is *any* other commandment, it is summed up in the saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8–10).

2. *Gospel*: Christ’s life, death and resurrection and how we participate in that finished work.
3. *Covenant signs*: Baptism (and the sealing of the Holy Spirit) and the Lord’s Supper.
4. *Civil duties*: These principles would include how the Christian is to relate to society and the governing authorities and would include interpretations and applications of new covenant principles to the specific time and culture.

The following illustration was helpful to me, and I hope it will be helpful to you as well. The ancestors of the founders of the United States lived under English rule. There were “moral” laws in England which dealt with killing, stealing, and many other such crimes. England was ruled by a king with a House of Lords and a House of Commons. The document of renown was the Magna Carta. Their flag was the Union Jack. The founders of our country patterned many of their laws after the laws in England. There were, however, important differences not only in the *laws*, but also in the *administration* of the laws. The United States does not have a king, a House of Lords, or a House of Commons. Rather our government has an elected president to administer the laws made by the Senate and House of Representatives. Our document of renown is the Constitution; our flag is the Stars and Stripes. As a U.S. citizen I am not under English rule.



Their laws do not apply to me in *any* way. However, that does not give me the right to kill, steal and commit other crimes. Why? Because under U.S. law these things are *also* forbidden. Such is the relationship between the old and new covenants. Both embrace the moral principles given by God. They differ, however, in the *administration* of those principles, and they have different “flags”—*covenant signs*.

Thus, while the new covenant clearly embraces *all* the moral laws of the old covenant, it presents these laws differently (general principles rather than specific details), it has *a different emphasis* (grace [done] rather than law [do]), and *it has a different flag* (Lord’s Supper rather than Sabbath).

Does this mean that the Old Testament is no longer of value to Christian Bible study? Never! The Old Testament is a gold mine of truth. But woe to the person who tries to apply old covenant law according to old covenant guidelines! What we must do, however, is *interpret all old covenant statements in light of the new covenant*.

Many have stumbled in their interpretation of Scripture in trying to make the covenant signs *intrinsically* moral. They are not moral in themselves and have religious value *only* as they are celebrated in connection with the covenant of which they are signs. There is no religious value in being submerged in water *unless* it is done as Christian baptism. There is no religious value in eating bread or drinking wine (or grape juice) *unless* it is done in remembrance of Christ’s death. There was no religious significance to circumcision *unless* it was done as a sign of the covenant community of the “sons of Israel.” Likewise there is no religious significance in resting on Saturday (or Sunday) *unless* it is done as a sign of the covenant between God and the sons of Israel.



## Moral law and secular society

When we say that with the coming of the new covenant the old covenant, including the Ten Commandments, is no longer binding we must be extremely careful what we mean and what we do not mean. We saw in the last chapter that for the *regenerate Christian* the Holy Spirit fills the role which the law held in the old covenant. It is the Holy Spirit who gives the *Christian* the ability to correctly interpret and apply the basic new covenant law to “love one another as Christ loved us” to specific life situations. In the complexities of life no amount of fixed rules will prove to be an adequate guide to cover the vast array of changing circumstances, thus in the better, new covenant we find fundamental principles to guide us.

The moral law is also a restrainer of evil for the *unregenerate*. Society is faced with the mystery of good and evil. There are some who have given themselves over to the influence or control of the evil one. For these people the law keeps them from being as evil as they would be were it not for *fear of punishment*. It must be clearly understood that the unconverted are not included within the new covenant (or old for that matter). Nevertheless *all* mankind are under the moral laws and principles of God. These laws are *intrinsically true* and operate whether or not they are known or unknown, accepted or rejected. I have chosen to write out a large portion from Romans 1, as it shows exactly what is happening within our society today as people disregard the moral principles of God.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without



excuse. For even through they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and fourfooted animals and crawling creatures. Therefore, God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own person the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper (Rom. 1:18–28).

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, those, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending themselves (Rom. 2:14,15).

It is vitally important to realize that when we speak of the old covenant, including the Ten Commandments, being superseded by the new covenant, we are speaking of the old covenant in totality, yet at the same time we are *not* doing away with any of the *moral principles* contained within the old covenant. We must also understand that for society to function without anarchy it must continue to have *specific moral laws* to restrain the evil of the unregenerate heart. Today modern society is reaping the results of the violation of God's moral law. God's eternal moral principles are not optional for a successful society.

Modern secular humanists who disregard God's moral principles will reap the inevitable results. We are seeing



within the United States and other places in the world a growing anarchy and human degeneration as a direct result of disobedience to God's moral laws.

However, the history of the Jews living under the old covenant gives ample illustration of the limitations of *specific laws* to govern *righteous living*. The Jews were continually faced with the interpretation of numerous laws for specific life situations. The new covenant, on the other hand, offers a much better guide for righteous living in that it operates from basic principles and the Christian has the indwelling Holy Spirit to interpret these principles to specific life situations.

## The Jerusalem Council

The Jerusalem Council, as recorded in Acts 15, was called for the express purpose of determining how a Christian was to relate to old covenant law. After much debate the council's written conclusion was,

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you [Gentile Christians] no greater burden than these essentials: That you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you do well. Farewell (Acts 15:28,29).

In the light of our previous study, this short summary is full of insight. Some have argued that it implies the Ten Commandments are still binding, or they would have given instruction regarding killing, stealing, etc., which obviously a Christian should not do. However, upon closer investigation, just the opposite is the case. Rather than take for granted that the Ten Commandments are still binding—which flies in the very face of the clear, contextual statements we studied above and the whole conclusion of the Jerusalem council—we must take for granted that these new covenant Christians were under the new covenant principle of “Love one another as I have



loved you." And *because* of this one far-reaching, basic moral principle, there was no need to spell out the details "You shall not kill," "You shall not steal," etc.

As we look at what was requested of the Gentile Christians one thing becomes immediately apparent: The required items were an *addition to* the basic new covenant principle of love, or were an *interpretation* of that principle. There were three requests the church council made of the Gentile converts. First, they were asked to abstain from things sacrificed to idols. The whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 8 is devoted to this issue. In summary they were asked to abstain from things offered to idols so they would not be a stumbling block to those weak in faith.

Second, these new Christians were asked to abstain from blood and from things strangled. This request was not made because it was part of the Sinaitic Covenant, because they were not under the Sinaitic Covenant, nor was it was part of the new covenant; rather, it was requested on the basis of obedience to the covenant God made with Noah which was not limited to the "sons of Israel" but was to apply to everyone.

Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only *you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood* (Gen. 9:3,4).

The third request of the Jerusalem Council was that Gentiles abstain from fornication. Why this request? Because there was danger then, *as there is danger today*, that someone might interpret "love one another" in a selfish, lustful way.

Some have argued that if the Sabbath were not binding in the New Testament church there would have been as heated a discussion regarding it as there was over circumcision. But this argument leaves out one important fact. In Judaism, Sabbath observance was required *only* if one was a member of the covenant community of which



circumcision was the entrance sign.<sup>1</sup> Let me illustrate this same principle in the new covenant. What Christian would seek to enforce the celebration of the Lord's Supper upon someone who had not accepted Christ and had not been baptized? Rather, the Lord's Supper in most churches is given *only* to those who have been baptized into Christ. The issue in the New Testament church was not circumcision per se, rather it was whether Christians should observe the old covenant regulations. The reason circumcision held such a prominent place in the discussions of the early church is that it was the entrance sign for the old covenant community and thus stood for *all* old covenant practices. Here is the important point: If circumcision were not required for Gentile Christians, then neither would Sabbath observance be required, for the Sabbath was reserved only for members of the old covenant community.

The sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a *sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever* (Ex. 31:16,17).

Not only was circumcision not required in the New Testament church, it was forbidden for religious purposes.

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. *Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace* (Gal. 5:1–4).

If Paul took a strong stand against those who were circumcised for religious reasons would he not do the same thing to those who wanted to keep Sabbath, the other sign of the old covenant? I believe he did in Col. 2:16,17



and Gal. 4:10,11, as was pointed out in Chapter 11 of this study.

The Jerusalem Council settled the issue to which this book is devoted. It did so, however, not by dealing with the Sabbath directly, but by way of eliminating the entrance sign into the old covenant: circumcision.

### Chapter Summary

1. According to Hebrews 8 the three main aspects of the new covenant are:
  - a. God's law is written on the heart by the Spirit.
  - b. All Christians are to have a personal knowledge of God.
  - c. God will not remember (take action regarding) our sins.
2. The general characteristics of the new covenant are:
  - a. General principles rather than specific details.
  - b. The emphasis is on grace (done) rather than law (do).
  - c. It is a personal covenant.
  - d. It is a covenant for all nations.
3. Christians are not under the authority of the old covenant.
  - a. Hebrews 8 and 9 specifically mention the "tables of the covenant" "regulations for divine worship" and say this covenant is old and ready to disappear.
  - b. Galatians 3 states that the law was given *until* Christ came.
  - c. Galatians 3 states that Christians are no longer under Sinaitic law.
  - d. Galatians 4 states that Christians are to cast out the bondwoman (a term Paul uses for the old covenant) and those who try to enforce old covenant laws upon Christians.



- e. Romans 4 states that the Gentiles can partake of the promise of righteousness by faith given to Abraham and completely bypass all old covenant law.
  - f. Romans 7 states that even Jewish Christians are released from the law as a guide to Christian service.
  - g. Romans 8 states that only the Christian who “walks by the Spirit” can enter into full fellowship with God.
  - h. Romans 10 states that Christ is the end of the law for the believer.
  - i. Ephesians 2 states that Christ abolished the enmity which was contained in commandments in decrees.
  - j. Philippians 3 states that righteousness comes from God on the basis of faith, not in obedience to law.
  - k. Colossians 2 states that the certificate of debt which was hostile to us (the old covenant) was nailed to the cross.
4. The old covenant laws can best be divided into four sections:
- a. Moral laws
  - b. Gospel shadows
  - c. Covenant signs: circumcision and Sabbath
  - d. Civil laws
5. The new covenant laws can best be divided into four sections:
- a. Moral principles
  - b. Gospel
  - c. Covenant signs: Baptism (and sealing of the Holy Spirit) and the Lord’s Supper
  - d. Civil duties



6. The moral principles of the new covenant contain all the moral principles upon which the old covenant moral laws were based.
7. God's moral principles are not an option. They are eternal and apply to all mankind.
8. Covenant signs have value *only* when they are celebrated in relationship to the covenant of which they are a sign. They are not moral in themselves.
9. The Jerusalem Council settled the question regarding the Christians' duty to observe the old covenant. Its decision was that Gentiles did not have to observe the old covenant. The point of discussion was circumcision as it was the entrance sign to the old covenant and stood for all old covenant practices.
  - a. The Jerusalem Council took for granted that the Christians would be under the laws of Jesus, and the command to love one another as Christ loved us would cover the moral principles.
  - b. The specific instructions the Jerusalem Council gave the Gentiles dealt with:
    - 1) Offering food to idols—to keep them from being a stumbling block to the weak.
    - 2) Abstaining from blood and things strangled—taken from the covenant of Noah.
    - 3) Abstaining from immorality—a needed interpretation of the commandment to love one another.
10. Paul states that if a Christian receives circumcision for religious reasons he will fall from grace. The observance of old covenant signs places one in the position of having to obey the *whole* old covenant.
11. It is not wrong to observe old covenant religious ceremonies as long as this observance is *not* done for religious reasons, but to help further the spread of the gospel among highly biased or prejudiced groups.



**Note**

<sup>1</sup> The biblical evidence is that the Sabbath was inaugurated for the people of Israel to be celebrated as a weekly sign of the covenant. The Sabbath is not viewed as a universal ordinance for all mankind but as a specific institution for Israel. As a sign of the covenant it was to last as long as that covenant. Harold H. P. Dressler, *The Sabbath in the Old Testament* in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, p. 34. Judaism as a whole considered the Sabbath to be binding on Israel alone. Max M. B. Turner, *The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts* in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, p. 128.



For I tell you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, “And He was classed among criminals”; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment.



## Chapter 14

### JESUS: THE LAW'S FULFILLMENT

#### Matthew 5:17–19

Matthew 5:17–19 has been a very important text to sabbatarians and others who want to support the continuing nature of the Ten Commandments. These verses deserve our careful study.

Think not that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:17–20).

The meaning of this text hinges on the meaning of two key words: *Law* and *fulfill*. Does “Law” refer to the Ten Commandments? Or, does “Law” refer to the whole old covenant? Does “fulfill” mean “do, and keep on doing” or does it mean “do,” in the sense that when it is once done, it is accomplished and no longer needs to be done again? Two widely differing interpretations have been given to these verses.

The first goes something like this: “By this statement, Jesus unmistakably teaches that the Ten Commandments are to continue and will not come to an end. This means that Christians must live in harmony with the Ten



Commandment law, which includes Sabbath observance, for not even the smallest letter or stroke is to be removed from this law. Those who teach that the law is abolished are clearly going against the will of Christ."

The second interpretation says that "Jesus clearly teaches that the whole law (including *all* that is written in the Torah) is to remain in force 'until all is fulfilled.' By His life, death, and resurrection Jesus fulfilled all the old covenant law (and prophecies) so this law is no longer binding on Christians."

To interpret these verses correctly we must first define the meaning of the two key words, "law" and "fulfill." This is best done by comparing *all* the other passages in the book of Matthew which use these two words and finding the meaning Matthew gives to them in other settings. Then with this information we can interpret these verses accordingly.

### The "law" in Matthew

The following quotations contain *all* the usages of the word "law" in the book of Matthew.

What ever you want others to do for you, do so for them, for this is the *law* and the Prophets (Mt. 7:12).

As used in this verse "Law" refers to the whole Torah (books of Moses) for it is associated with prophets. Thus, we have represented two of the three divisions of the Old Testament Scriptures which were divided into law, prophets, and psalms. Without doubt the Ten Commandments are included in this law, but we cannot limit "law" as used here to the Ten Commandments.

For all the prophets and the *Law* prophesied until John (Mt. 11:13).

In this verse the "Law" refers to the whole Torah. There is no prophecy given in the Ten Commandments.



Or have you not read in the *Law*, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent (Mt. 12:5).

The portion of the “Law” referred to here is not the Ten Commandments but Lev. 24:5–9, which gives the duties of the priests.

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the *Law*?” And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, “You shall love <sup>thy</sup> your neighbor as yourself” (Mt. 22:36–39).

The first quotation is taken from Deuteronomy 6:5 and the second is from Leviticus 19:18. No portion of the Ten Commandments is quoted, although this quotation is sometimes seen as a summary of the moral principles contained within the Ten Commandments.

On these two commandments depend the whole *Law* and the Prophets (Mt. 22:40).

Again the “whole Law and the Prophets” makes it mandatory that we define “Law” as the Torah, and not limit it to the Ten Commandments.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provision of the *law*: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others (Mt. 23:23).

Again, the “Law” as used here is more than the Ten Commandments.

These are *all* the passages in the book of Matthew which use “Law,” other than the use of this term in Matthew 5:17–19. Therefore, unless there are strong contextual reasons for interpreting “Law” as the Ten Commandments in Matthew 5:17–19, we must understand “Law” as referring to the Torah, the books of Moses,



because in every other use of the word “Law” in the book of Matthew it *never once* refers to the Ten Commandments alone, but *always* to the whole law, or to portions of the law other than the Ten Commandments.

When we look at the context of Matthew 5:17–19 we immediately recognize Jesus uses “Law” with the “Prophets.” “Think not that I have come to abolish the Law *or* the Prophets . . .” Even the context here leans heavily in favor of understanding “Law” to be the Torah. We must, therefore, conclude that the “Law” Jesus has reference to is the *entire* old covenant law, which included the Ten Commandments.

### “Fulfill” in the book of Matthew

Below are listed *all* the passages where Matthew uses the word “fulfill.” In each passage seek to determine what Matthew means when he uses this word. Does he use “fulfill” to apply to an event which was done once and needs never to be done again, or does he use “fulfill” in the idea of “do and keep on doing”?

Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be *fulfilled*, saying, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us” (Mt. 1:22,23).

Here “fulfilled” is used in connection with the virgin birth of Jesus, an event which was done only once.

And [Joseph with Jesus] was there until the death of Herod; that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be *fulfilled*, saying, “Out of Egypt did I call My Son” (Mt. 2:15).

Jesus was called out of Egypt once.

Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was *fulfilled*, saying, “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children” (Mt. 2:17).



This prophecy was “fulfilled” once by the events connected with the birth of Jesus.

And [Joseph, with Jesus] came and resided in a city called Nazareth; that what was spoken through the prophets might be *fulfilled*, “He shall be called a Nazarene” (Mt. 2:23).

There was no ongoing fulfillment of this prophecy. It was done once.

In order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be *fulfilled*, saying, “He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases” (Mt. 8:17).

There is no further fulfillment by Christians in this verse as Christ is the only sin-bearer and He did this only once.

In order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, might be *fulfilled*, saying, Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him and He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory. And in His name the Gentiles will hope (Mt. 12:17–21).

Christ fulfilled this prophecy once.

And in this case the prophecy of Isaiah is being *fulfilled*, which says, “You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull” (Mt. 13:14,15).

The people of Jesus’ day fulfilled this prophecy by their rejection of Jesus.

Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be *fulfilled*, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted upon a donkey, even upon a colt, the foal of a beast of burden” (Mt. 21:4,5).



Christ, and Christ alone fulfilled this prophecy once.

Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then shall the Scriptures be *fulfilled*, that it must happen this way? (Mt. 26:53,54)

Christ fulfilled this prophecy once.

“But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets may be *fulfilled*,” Then all the disciples left Him and fled (Mt. 26:56).

The disciples fulfilled this prophecy once. There is no ongoing fulfillment.

Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was *fulfilled*, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; and they gave them for the Potter’s Field, as the Lord directed me” (Mt. 27:9,10).

In the book of Matthew *every time* the word “fulfill” is used, it is employed in connection with the life of Christ, or the events connected with it. In *every instance* it was *one event* which “fulfilled” the prophecy. In *every instance* Christians are not to participate in any ongoing fulfillment.

For these reasons we *must* interpret the word “fulfill” in Matthew 5:17–19 as referring to something that Jesus would do in connection with His work as the Messiah. Christians should not read into this passage any ongoing fulfillment in which they participate.

With this background, let us again look at Matthew 5:17–19.

Think not that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to *fulfill*. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, *until all is accomplished*. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but



whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:17–19).

In John we read,

After this, Jesus, *knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that Scripture might be fulfilled*, said, "I am thirsty" (Jn. 19:28–30).

This verse is extremely important to a correct understanding of Matthew 5:17–19. Here we find that Jesus had already accomplished all but one of the prophecies regarding the life and death of the Messiah. One thing, however, still remained to be fulfilled, so Jesus said, "I thirst."

When we let Scripture be our interpreter, the meaning of this passage becomes evident. Notice how it fits perfectly into the context. In the book of Matthew we find this passage coming soon after Jesus gives His "ten blessings" on the mount. It comes just before the six times He says, "You have heard . . . but I say unto you." In the context it is evident that Jesus is taking authority to Himself greater than that of old covenant law. It would be very easy for His listeners to conclude that He was completely doing away with the binding nature of the old covenant. This He will do, but not before He *completely fulfills* the prophecies, types and shadows which pointed forward to His work as the Messiah and Savior of the world which are recorded in the law. Therefore, the law must continue until He has accomplished everything. This happened, according to John, at the death of Jesus.

This interpretation is the only one supported by the contextual setting. If one were to conclude that Jesus was teaching the continuing nature of the law in this passage, the Christian would immediately be faced with a dilemma. For this Scripture expressly states that not one thing, not even the smallest punctuation mark, is to be removed from the law. Thus, if the Christian is going to use this text to prove the perpetuity of the old covenant



law, he must also use it to prove the binding nature of *all* old covenant law. In writing to the Galatians Paul warned his readers that they could *not* take only part of the law and leave the rest.

I testify again to every man who received circumcision, that he *is under obligation to keep the whole law* (Gal. 5:3).

We are left with only two choices: Jesus fulfilled the law for us and thus freed us from the dominion of the old covenant, or we must keep *every bit* of the old covenant. There are no other choices.

### How Jesus Fulfilled the Law

All would agree that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies, but how, some ask, did He fulfill the Law? First we have His clear statement.

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me that you might have life (Jn. 5:38,39).

For if you ~~believed Moses [books of the Law]~~, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me (Jn. 5:46).

The context of this last quotation from John is in connection with a Sabbath healing. This suggests that the Sabbath was one of the ways the law spoke of Christ. How the Sabbath pointed forward to Christ will become more evident in the chapters which follow.

On the day of His resurrection Jesus joined two disciples as they walked to Emmaus. Luke gives a summary of the discussion.

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Lk. 24:27). *See Lk 17:31*

*Jn 5: 45-47*

Following is a partial list of things in the law which pointed forward to Christ and were fulfilled by Him.







## Hebrews 8

Obsolete covenant

New and better covenant

If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me (Jn. 5:46).

### Jesus, the Fulfillment of the Law's Moral Principles

At this point some may ask, “Has Jesus also fulfilled the *moral* principles of the law?” The answer is a resounding *YES!* That is the good news of the Gospel!

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men; even so *through one act of righteousness* [the life and death of Jesus] *there resulted justification of life to all men*. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so *through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous* (Rom. 5:18,19).

The heart of the new covenant gospel is that we are accepted, not on the basis of *our own* (moral) law keeping, but upon the perfect righteousness of Christ. It is this fact, and this fact *alone*, that gives us the assurance of salvation. It is this “one act of righteousness”—by “the obedience of the One”—that is the only foundation stone of Christian assurance.

In Him you have been made complete (Col. 2:10). [Therefore] . . . we have confidence to enter the [most] holy place by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19). For by *one offering He has perfected for all time* those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:14).

Does this mean that the Christian does not have to live a moral life? Never! In Greek “being sanctified” is in the present continuous tense indicating that God has us all



in the process of "being made holy." The Christian's moral life is not the basis of his acceptance with God, rather it is the result of it. As paradoxical as the following statement sounds, it is nevertheless true. Whenever the new covenant gospel is presented in its *clarity* there is danger of *misunderstanding*. It was true in Paul's day; it is true in ours. I am reminded of the time some years ago when one of my sons and I climbed Mt. Shasta. We spent a sleepless, bitterly cold night near the top of this 14,000-foot windy, snow-covered mountain. The next morning we started our descent. I'll never forget the mixed feeling of exhilaration and fear I had as we inched our way along the steep, slippery spine of a ridge. One step too far to the left and we would slide hundreds, if not thousands, of feet down an icy precipice of the mountain. One step too far to the right and we would fall over a steep cliff. A mistake on either side would prove fatal. So it is with the gospel. Jesus said "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life . . ." (Mt. 7:14). Were it not for the Spirit's continuous ministry in each life, no one could ever make it. When we understand the heights and depths of grace we must be careful that the freedom of the gospel does not give license, on the one hand, to live in sin. On the other hand, we must never let our holy living enter into the basis of our acceptance with God.

For example, in the book of Romans, Paul lays a solid foundation of justification by faith in Chapters 3–5.

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law (Rom. 3:28).

He speaks of Christ's "one act of righteousness," and "the obedience of the One." As Paul climbs the towering mountain of Grace he senses the danger of taking just one step off the path of truth. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?"



(Rom. 6:1). Notice carefully the reasoning of his argument.

May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life . . . even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:2–4, 11).

Because of what Christ has already done for us we can now “consider” ourselves to be dead to sin and free to live for God. In Romans 13 Paul gives admonition regarding Christian living. Quoting from a portion of the Ten Commandments, he says,

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in one saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8–10).

In these verses Paul clearly shows that the law of love encompasses all the moral principles of the Ten Commandments. In the book of Galatians Paul gives the same advice.

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the *whole Law is fulfilled* in one word, in the statement, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Gal. 5:13, 14).

Jesus fulfilled all the old covenant law. His life, death and resurrection and the events connected with them fulfilled the prophecies pointing forward to the Messiah.



The many gospel shadows found their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us (2 Cor. 1:20).

Our Lord, as our substitute and surety, fulfilled the moral law *for us*. Now, in grateful response to so great a salvation, we live a moral life *for Him*.

### Chapter Summary

1. In Matthew 5:17–19 Jesus clearly teaches that the whole law (including all that is written in the Torah) was to remain in force until all was fulfilled. By His life, death, and resurrection Jesus fulfilled all the old covenant law (and prophecies) so this law is no longer binding on Christians.
  - a. Every time the word “law” is used in the book of Matthew it is always used for the whole old covenant or for some portion of the old covenant other than the Ten Commandments.
  - b. Every time the word “fulfill” is used in the book of Matthew it is always used in connection with the events surrounding the life of Christ. It is never used in the context of an ongoing practice in the life of a Christian.
  - c. The interpretation above harmonizes with the context of Matthew and the other gospel writers.
  - d. If Matthew 5:17–19 is interpreted to prove the perpetuity of the old covenant law, then one must keep the whole old covenant law, for not even a punctuation mark is to be removed.
2. The New Testament clearly shows how the cere-



monies and practices of the old covenant pointed forward to some aspect of the life, death or resurrection of Christ.

3. By His perfect life, sacrificial death and resurrection Jesus fulfilled the moral requirements of the law for us.
4. The freedom of the Gospel does not give Christians the liberty to sin.
5. The holy living of the Christian is never the basis of his acceptance with God, but the result of it.
6. All the moral principles of the Ten Commandments and other old covenant laws can be summed up in the one principle of love.



## Chapter 15

### THE REST THAT REMAINS

#### Hebrews 3 and 4

We now come to the good news of this study on the Sabbath: the “rest” that remains for the believer. There is real gold, so to speak, in these two chapters of Hebrews. These are not easy chapters to read or understand. Therefore to extract the precious “gold” will require concentrated effort on our part. Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who had undergone some persecution and who would be faced with more in the future. It was intended to show the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Or, to put it in other words, these chapters show how much better the new covenant is than the old. Notice how this theme of “betterness” is central to this book.

- Jesus is a better revelation of truth (Heb. 1:1–3)
- Jesus is better than the angels (Heb. 1:3–14)
- Jesus is better than Moses (Heb. 3:1–6)
- Jesus is better than Aaron (Heb. 5)
- Jesus is a better high priest (Heb. 6,7)
- The new covenant has a better law (Heb. 7:12)
- The new covenant is a better covenant (Heb. 8:6)
- The new covenant has better promises (Heb. 8:6)
- The new covenant has a greater temple (Heb. 9:11)
- The new covenant has better sacrifices (Heb. 9:23)
- The new covenant has a better possession (Heb. 10:34)
- The new covenant has a better country (Heb. 11:16)
- The new covenant has a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35)
- The new covenant has something better (Heb. 11:40)



- The new covenant has better blood (Heb. 12:24)
- The new covenant has better atonement (Heb. 10:1–25)

In this list from Hebrews we have left out the last part of Chapter 3 and all of Chapter 4. Here our author argues that the new covenant has *a better Sabbath*. We will study one or two verses at a time, distill the facts from these verses and summarize what is taught. Then we will simply review the summaries, and the meaning will become clear.

In the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews the writer shows how Jesus is greater than Moses. He demonstrates this by showing that Moses, as a servant, did not give his household (Israel) “God’s rest.” Then he will prove that Christ, as a faithful Son over His household (the church), does give “God’s rest.” It is important to note that the author of Hebrews is drawing upon Psalm 95 for his support. Follow closely as he works out this truth.

Now Moses was faithful in all His house [Israel] as a servant (Heb. 3:5).

Christ was faithful as a Son over His house [the church] whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end (Heb. 3:6).

Israel, the household of Moses, lost faith because the people hardened their hearts (Heb. 3:8). Here we know that our author is referring to the experience recorded in Exodus 17:7 where Israel put the Lord to the test. We know this because the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95, which in turn mentions “Meribath and Massah” by name. Because of the unbelief demonstrated at Meribath and Massah Israel was left to wander in the wilderness for forty years (Heb. 3:9). “As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter *My rest*.” Then our author brings a timely warning to his readers,

But take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the



living God. But encourage one another *day after day*, as long as it is still called "*Today*," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end (Heb. 3:12–14). *Today* if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts (Heb. 3:15). And to whom did He swear that they should not enter *His rest*, but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief (Heb. 3:18,19).

So far we can distill five important facts from these words. (1) As Israel lost faith on the very borders of the promised land, so the Church needs to be certain that it not lose faith. (2) Israel (those who tested God as recorded in Ex. 17:7) did *not* enter *God's rest*. (3) They did not enter God's rest because of unbelief. (4) Emphasis is placed on "today" as the day of decision. (5) "Today" is an extended period of time: "as long as it is called today."

Therefore, let us fear lest, while *a promise remains of entering His rest*, any one of you should seem to have come short of it (Heb. 4:1).

The author clearly states that *there remains a promise of entering God's rest*. Notice carefully in the next few verses how one enters God's rest!

For indeed we have had *good news* preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For *we who have believed enter that rest*; just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although *His works were finished from the foundation of the world* (Heb. 4:2,3).

Here we find three more facts which need to be underlined in our thinking. (1) The rest of God has to do with the "*good news*." (2) We enter the rest of God *by believing*. (3) This "rest" is in some way related to the *creation rest*.



For He has thus said somewhere concerning the *seventh day*, “*And God rested on the seventh day from all His works*”; and again in this passage, “They shall not enter My rest” (Heb. 4:4,5).

Here, as if to add emphasis, our author repeats two important points: (1) The “rest” is related to the *seventh-day, creation rest*. (2) This “rest” Israel did *not* experience.

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a day, “*Today*,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before. “*Today* if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 4:7).

Here the author of Hebrews shows that Israel, *in the time of David*, had not yet entered God’s rest. Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:7, stressing the idea that “*Today*” we are not to harden our hearts. He drives this point home.

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of *another day* after that (Heb. 4:8).

While it is obvious that if Israel had not yet entered God’s rest by the time of David, certainly they could not have entered it in the days of Joshua, as Joshua lived long before David. Nevertheless it is of interest to note what is said about Joshua and rest. Our author states forthrightly that Joshua did *not* give Israel “rest.” But did he? Notice carefully these verses taken from the book of Joshua.

And the Lord gave them *rest* on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; for the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass (Josh. 21:43–45).

Here, on the one hand, the writer of Hebrews states forthrightly that Joshua did *not* give Israel rest and Israel had not yet even entered God’s rest in the time of David,



yet on the other hand, Joshua states that the Lord *did* give Israel rest. This is not a contradiction because they are speaking of *two different types of rest*.

First, our author states that the Israelites *who rebelled* and lost faith did not enter God's rest (Heb. 3:11). But these were the very people to whom God gave the *seventh-day Sabbath*. These people were present at the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai. It was these very people who participated in the wilderness tabernacle services. Without question we know that *they* were given the *seventh-day Sabbath rest of Sinai*. But notice that Hebrews states these Sabbath-keeping Israelites did *not* enter "God's rest." Here we see that our author is definitely referring to a type of "rest" *other than* the seventh-day Sabbath rest of Sinai.

Second, our author says that *Joshua* did *not* give the people "rest." Now the author is referring to a different group of people—not the ones who rebelled at Massah and Meribath, because they died in the wilderness. The people Joshua brought into the land of Canaan were the *children of those who died in the wilderness*.

For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, that is, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not listen to the voice of the Lord, to whom the Lord had *sworn* that He would not let them see the *land* which the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give us, a *land* flowing with milk and honey. And their children whom He raised up in their place . . . (Josh. 5:6,7).

In this quotation from Joshua we see that the oath of God regarding the Israelites who did not listen to the voice of God had to do with their entering the *promised land*. And Joshua, in the quotation listed above, states that God did give them (the children of those who rebelled) "*rest on every side*" and "all the promises of God came to pass." In other words, the "rest" which Joshua gave Israel was *rest from their enemies*.



Therefore, the “rest of God” mentioned in Hebrews *cannot be rest from enemies*. This is why David, many years later, could say, “Today, if you would hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts” (Ps. 95:7).

Summarizing the above evidence leads to three more facts. (1) Israel, *at the time of Joshua*, did not enter “God’s rest.” (2) The “rest” our author is encouraging his readers to enter into is *not* the “rest” from their enemies. (3) Israel had not yet entered into God’s rest in the time of David.

Now that we have seen what the author of Hebrews is *not* referring to when he speaks of “God’s rest,” we now come to what he *does* mean by “God’s rest.”

There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter *that rest*, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience (Heb. 4:9–11).

Here we have several more facts. (1) This rest is called a “Sabbath rest.” The Greek word here used for “Sabbath rest” is *sabbatismos*. It is the *only* place in Scripture where this word is used. While this word is used in later non-biblical writings for the seventh-day Sabbath, it can, and should, have a unique meaning as used here. (2) We are told this promise of “Sabbath rest” *remains* for the people of God. (3) The one who has entered this rest *has also rested* from his works. (4) “Has rested” in Greek is in the aorist tense, which means that this action happened *in an instant* and took place at some point of time *in the past*. (5) This “rest” from “works” is to be of the same nature as God’s seventh-day creation rest. (6) We are to be diligent to enter “that rest.” Now let us simply line up all these scriptural facts and see to what conclusions they lead us.

1. The church is encouraged not to lose faith.



2. The Israelites who were alive in the experience recorded in Exodus 17:7 did *not* enter into the “rest of God” but they *did receive and keep the seventh-day Sabbath of Sinai*.
3. Israel did not enter into “rest” because of unbelief.
4. The author places much stress on “today” as the day of decision.
5. “Today” is an ongoing period of time: “as long as it is called today.”
6. The “rest of God” is associated with the “*good news*.”
7. We enter the “rest of God” *by believing*.
8. This “rest of God” is associated with God’s seventh-day *creation rest*.
9. Israel, at the time of Joshua, did *not* enter “God’s rest” but they did enter the promised land and experience “rest” from their enemies.
10. Israel, at the time of David, had not yet entered God’s rest.
11. This “rest of God” is called a “Sabbath rest”—*a unique rendering of the word*.
12. The promise of entering “God’s rest” *remains*.
13. Those who enter “God’s rest” have *rested from their works* as God did from His.
14. Those who have rested from their work did so in a point of time in the past.

## Conclusions:

This “rest” *cannot* be the *seventh-day Sabbath* of the fourth commandment for five reasons:

First, the Israelites who disbelieved, as mentioned in Exodus 17:7, were the same people to whom God gave the Sabbath as recorded in Exodus 16 (the giving of the manna). They were the same people to whom God gave the Ten Commandments at Sinai (Ex. 20). They were the same people who kept the seventh-day Sabbath, and the



other sabbaths included in the “appointed times of the Lord” (Lev. 23). The author of Hebrews states *three times* that these people *did not enter the rest of God* to which he is referring (Heb. 3:11,18,19).

Second, the next generation of Israelites who were not included in the oath of God which stated “They shall not enter My rest” (Heb. 3:11) also, according to the author of Hebrews, did not enter into the rest of God to which he was referring. Nor had Israel entered God’s rest in the time of David (Heb. 4:7,8), but all of these groups had the Sabbath of the fourth commandment during this time.

Third, the concept of “believing” is *never* associated with keeping the seventh-day Sabbath in the old covenant. Rather, the way an Israelite entered into the Sabbath rest of the fourth commandment was by complete physical rest, not doing any work, not carrying a load, not building a fire, not going out of one’s place, not buying or selling, and not cooking. However, the writer of Hebrews states “For we who have *believed* enter that rest” (Heb. 4:3).

Fourth, those who rested from their works on the seventh-day Sabbath were required to repeat their Sabbath rest every seven days. The writer of Hebrews, however, by using the Greek aorist tense in connection with “has rested,” shows that the believer who rests from his works did so *at one point of time in the past*.

Fifth, the author of Hebrews states that the promise of entering God’s rest is good “today” and shows that “today” is an extended period of time: “as long as it is called today.” This “today” is *not* every seventh day.

The “rest of God,” referred to in Hebrews 3 and 4, *must* refer to the “rest” of grace which is characterized by a renewed relationship between man and God because of the following nine important reasons.

First, this rest of God is associated with the “*good news*” (gospel) (Heb. 4:2,6).

Second, one enters this “rest” *by believing* (Heb. 4:3).



Third, the one who “has himself also rested from his works” did that resting at *a point in past time*. This must refer to the point of salvation when a person believes and ceases striving to be acceptable to God on the basis of his own “works” and “rests” in God’s grace!

Fourth, this “rest” is associated, *not with the rest of Sinai, but with the seventh-day rest of creation*. The creation rest of God was characterized by fellowship with man which was uninterrupted by sin. The fellowship with God that is available to the Christian is of *this* nature.

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of Grace (Heb. 4:16). For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb. 10:14). Therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the [most] holy place by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19).

By faith we are already seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). The Spirit-filled Christian may enter into the experience which Jesus offered.

If anyone loves Me he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him (Jn. 14:23).

We, as Christians, may say,

Indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 1:3).

He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven all our transgressions (Col. 2:13).

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life (Jn. 6:47).

The rest of grace goes *far beyond* the rest of the seventh-day Sabbath of Sinai. It approaches the very rest of God—the seventh-day creation rest! This is the true “Sabbath rest” which the blind beggar experienced in John 9. He had been called, healed, washed, forgiven, found and *was worshiping in the very presence of the Creator* while the Pharisees who were keeping the Sabbath rest of the fourth commandment rejected the Messiah.



Fifth, the writer of Hebrews characterizes this rest as a “Sabbath rest” by using a word which is *unique* to Scripture. I believe he did this to give it special meaning just as we do when we put quotation marks around a word as I have done with the term “God’s rest.” As pointed out above, the author is showing how much better the new covenant is over the old. I believe the truth he is trying to convey is that the “Sabbath” (sabbatismos, Gr.) of the new covenant is better than the Sabbath (sabbaton, Gr.) of the old covenant.

Sixth, the writer of Hebrews is showing that this “Sabbath” rest of the new covenant is even *better* than the “rest” God gave Israel when they conquered Canaan and it is also *better* than the rest Israel experienced under their hero, King David.

Seventh, Hebrews was written for the purpose of encouraging Hebrew Christians to remain faithful and not fall back under old covenant law and worship. Near the end of this book it is written:

For you have *not come to a mountain* that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. [This is a graphic description of the giving of the Ten Commandments. See Ex. 19:16–25; 20:18.] But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general *assembly and church* of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a *new covenant* (Heb. 12:18–24).

Considering the context of this whole book, one must conclude that the Christian is *not* to look to Sinai for *leadership*. Jesus is better than Moses. The Christian is *not* to look to Sinai for *priesthood*. The priesthood of Jesus is far superior to that of Aaron. The believer is *not* to look to Sinai for *forgiveness of sin*. Jesus really



forgives our sin, while the blood of animals could not. And the Christian is *not* to look to Sinai for *God's rest*. Jesus brings a better "Sabbath rest"—the rest of His grace, which is closer to the Eden rest of God than it is to the rest of the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment of Sinai.

Eighth, in the old covenant the "rest" was experienced once each seventh day. The writer of Hebrews stresses the word "*today*" on several occasions. In the new covenant, one can enter into God's rest "*today*." He does not have to wait until the end of the week. In Hebrews 13 we have a beautiful definition of new covenant worship:

Through Him [Jesus] then let us *continually* offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Heb. 13:15,16).

The new covenant believer is to rejoice in God's rest *continually*.

Ninth, both the promise of rest and the rest itself *remain*. This rest does not end. Just as the phrase, "and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day," was omitted in the record of that Eden rest, the new covenant rest *remains* for the people of God. I praise God for the "better" "Sabbath rest"—the rest of God's gracious, intimate fellowship which *remains for the one who has believed!*

### **Matthew 11:28–30**

Come unto Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.

These words are found *just before* the incident of Jesus walking through the grainfields on the Sabbath. They are,



by context, closely associated with the topic of Sabbath. Jesus and His disciples are living in the reality of Jubilee. Like Adam and Eve in Eden, they are eating their food direct from nature. They are enjoying God's true rest.

Jesus is inviting the weary and heavy laden to come to *Him* for true rest. Jesus is the center of rest for Christians. It is only "in Him" that we can be free from the *burden of sin* and the weary impossibility of trying by *our own works* to be acceptable to God. The rest that Jesus offers is not the rest of the fourth commandment of Sinai, rather it is the rest of soul. It is restored fellowship with the Creator of the universe! His invitation is not limited to the people who were to keep the Sinai Sabbath—the sons of Israel—but to "*all* who are weary and heavy laden." The new covenant gospel trumpet sounds to all nations: "Whoever believes in Him" will not perish (Jn. 3:16). Whoever comes will not be disappointed. All who receive Him receive the right to sonship in the restored family of God (Jn. 1:12).

What is the "yoke" Jesus asks us to take? First, we note it is *His yoke*. It is *not the yoke of Moses, but the yoke of Jesus*. Second, we see that Scripture often uses the word "yoke" for the old covenant law. In the Jerusalem Council there were those gathered who wanted to require Gentile Christians to keep the "Law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). Peter, in responding to these legalistic believers said,

Now therefore, why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a *yoke* which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear (Acts 15:10)?

Here, without question, "yoke" refers to the old covenant. Further, this yoke is implied to be a *heavy yoke*, which neither the Jews of New Testament times nor their ancestors were able to bear.

In Galatians 4, Paul gives the allegory of the two



women which ends with “cast out the bondwoman.” As we studied before, this can, in context, mean nothing else than cast out the old covenant and those who try to get Christians to keep it. In Galatians 5:1 we read,

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a *yoke of slavery*.

With this usage of yoke in mind, let us return to Christ’s words. “Take my yoke upon you.” Here He is saying, “Take my *law of love* upon you.” Note how the context supports this interpretation, “and *learn* from Me.” Jesus, as we saw before, is the new covenant. He is the way, the truth and the life. In the new covenant we are not pointed back to Sinai, but, like Mary, we are to sit at His feet and *learn* from Him. As the experience on the mount of transfiguration teaches, we are to see no one but *Jesus only*. While Sinai was associated with violent shaking, darkness, gloom, and fear, the better, new covenant law, Jesus Himself, is “gentle and humble in heart.” While old covenant Israel experienced only the rest of the fourth commandment—physical rest—those who come to Jesus find *rest of soul*. While the old covenant, according to Peter, was so heavy that no one in the Jewish nation, fathers or sons, was able to bear it, the new covenant law of Jesus is “easy.” His load (commandment) is *light*.

So in the context of the Jews desperately trying to keep the letter of the Sinaitic Sabbath laws, condemning the very people who were following the One who was restoring Eden’s rest, we find Jesus offering the true “Sabbath rest.”

Jesus is the true rest—the *rest* which *remains* for the one who *believes*! Will you enter His rest? You can do it today.



On the first day of the week . . . Jesus said to them. “Peace be with you, as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” . . . He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”



## Chapter 16

# THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

### Introduction

A study on the topic of the Sabbath would not be complete without an examination of the New Testament “first day” and “Lord’s day” references. Most Christian groups worship on Sunday but their reason for doing so varies widely. Some believe the sacredness of the old covenant seventh-day Sabbath was transferred over to Sunday in the new covenant and they keep Sunday holy (some call it Sabbath) by not working on this day. Others worship on Sunday “in honor of the Lord’s resurrection,” and make no attempt to “keep” the day. They feel perfectly free to return home from church and go to work, or to engage in other activities which would be forbidden by old covenant Sabbath law. I hope the findings of this chapter, when integrated with the other material in this book, will give the worshiping Christian greater insight regarding the day of worship.

We will examine *every* first-day text in the New Testament to discover what is taught or not taught regarding the first day of the week.

### Resurrection Day, First-day References

Now late on the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward *the first day of the week*, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave (Mt. 28:1).

And when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and



Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen (Mk. 16:1,2).

Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed after, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. And they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on *the first day of the week*, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb (Lk. 23:55–24:2).

From these three passages several facts emerge. (1) Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week. (2) The women who followed Jesus felt it more important to keep the Sabbath “according to the commandment” than to anoint the body of Jesus. (3) There was no mix-up in days at the time of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

### **First-day Appearances of the Resurrected Lord**

Scripture records seven appearances of the resurrected Lord. Five of these occurred on the first day of the week. In the other two accounts, by the sea of Tiberius (Jn. 21) and the ascension (Acts 1:6–10), there is no record of what day it was. Jesus appeared to:

**Mary, the morning of the resurrection** (Mt. 28:8–10; Mk. 16:9; Jn. 20:11–18)

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary . . . departed from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples and behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and *worshiped Him*. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me” (Mt. 28:8–10).



**The two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk. 24: 13–33; Mk. 16:12,13)**

In this account Cleopas, and an unnamed disciple, were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

Jesus himself approached, and began traveling with them . . . And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” . . . And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures . . . And it came about that when He had reclined at table with them, *He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them.* And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight . . . (Lk. 24:15–31).

**Simon (Lk. 24:34)**

The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon.

**The eleven on the evening of resurrection Sunday (Mk. 16:14–18; Lk. 24:36–44, Jn. 20:19–23)**

When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut *where the disciples were for fear of the Jews*, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, “*Peace be with you.*” And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore *rejoiced when they saw the Lord*. Jesus therefore said to them again, “*Peace be with you, as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained*” (Jn. 20:19–23).

**To the eleven “eight days later” (Jn. 20:26–29)**

And after eight days (a week later—see margin) again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, “*Peace be with you.*” Then He said to



Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "*My Lord and my God!*" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

### Summary of first-day appearances

Several things should be mentioned from these records of first-day appearances. First, there are no planned "first day of the week" meetings, as if Christ had told His disciples before His death to meet on the first day of the week. Rather, the disciples were taken by surprise. They were apparently afraid for their own lives and were hiding behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews."

Second, while the events which happened on this day seem not to have been planned by the disciples, that in no way diminishes the importance of what did transpire in the sovereign will of God.

(1) On Sunday morning Mary "*worshipped Him.*" (2) On Sunday evening Jesus *took bread, blessed it, broke it and began to give it to the disciples* in Emmaus. It is of importance to note that these two disciples recognized Jesus *in the breaking of the bread*. Only a few days earlier He had broken bread, given it to His disciples and said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk. 22:19). When they did recognize Jesus, He suddenly vanished from their sight. (3) Sunday night Jesus said, "*Peace be with you,*" two times. (4) Sunday evening Jesus *commissioned His disciples* by saying, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (5) On the evening of the first day of the week Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" (6) Sunday evening Jesus *gave* His disciples the authority to *proclaim forgiveness* to those who believe in Him.

The meeting on the Sunday evening a week after the resurrection is of interest on two accounts. First, why



were they meeting on Sunday evening? This question, for our purposes, has only two possible answers. If the disciples were *purposely* meeting on the first day of the week it would show that some significance was given to this day. On the other hand, they may have been meeting together on many evenings or even living together and it just happened to be on this evening that Jesus appeared to them. If the former is correct then it appears that the *disciples* were giving some significance to the first day of the week. However, if the latter is the case, then *Jesus* is the one who chooses to reveal Himself on the first day of the week. (7) In either case, some significance must be given to the fact that Jesus appeared to the disciples “eight days later”—a commonly accepted term for “next week.”<sup>1</sup> (8) It was on this occasion that Thomas said, “*My Lord and my God!*”

(9) When a day is mentioned in connection with the appearances of the risen Lord it is *always* the first day of the week.

### Pentecost

While there is no mention of the first day of the week in the record of the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2, the fact that Pentecost fell that year on the first day of the week is well attested.<sup>2</sup> John 19:31 states that the day Jesus was in the grave was a “high day.” This term was used when the annual sabbath of the Passover and the weekly Sabbath came together. If we accept this, then fifty days later would bring us to the first day of the week. Again, very significant events happened on this day, but the fact that the first day of the week is *not* mentioned in connection with these events may mean little significance should be given to the fact that Pentecost fell on Sunday. In other words, the *event* of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is more important than the *day* upon which it was given.



We would expect this under the new covenant, where *reality* takes precedence over *form*.

### Acts 20:6–12

And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the windowsill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead. But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him." And when he had gone back up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted.

This is a very complex section, as we will soon see. If Luke is using Jewish time, as he usually does, this evening meeting was on Saturday night. In Jewish reckoning the new day always started at sundown. However, this was a Gentile Christian church which probably used Roman time. Nevertheless, Luke says this meeting took place on *the first day of the week*. The fact that there were "many lamps in the upper room" where they were gathered (Acts 20:8) is evidence that this evening meeting was not a holdover meeting from a Sabbath morning service as some have argued. The many lamps show that the people came prepared for the *evening* service. The weight of evidence is that this was a Sunday evening meeting, probably the regular meeting time for the Christians in Troas.<sup>3</sup>

Luke states they "were gathered together *to break bread*," indicating this was the purpose of their meeting together. Some have argued this was a specially called



meeting as Paul was “intending to depart the next day.” Paul could have left Troas earlier and gone by ship but he chose to wait and then walk some thirty miles to Assos. Why did he wait? The most probable reason was that Paul wanted to address the Christian believers in Troas before he left and he waited until their regular meeting time to do so.

The term “break bread” should not be confused with the Jewish expression “to eat bread.” The latter is a common Jewish term for a regular meal. “Break bread,” however, is commonly associated with the Lord’s Supper.<sup>4</sup>

And having taken some *bread*, when He had given thanks, He *broke* it, and gave it to them, saying: “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (Lk. 22:19).

And it came about that when He had reclined at table with them, He took *bread* and blessed it, and *breaking* it, He began giving it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight (Lk. 24:30,31).

And they began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the *breaking of the bread* (Lk. 24:35)

And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and *breaking bread* from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart (Acts 2:46).

There are several other things we should note regarding the last verse (Acts 2:46) above. First, it is clear that the early Christians continued to worship in the temple. We should also recognize that the Jews would not have allowed the Christians to participate in the Lord’s Supper in the Jewish temple. This necessitated their meeting “from house to house.” The fact that this breaking of bread was said to be a daily occurrence does not mean *every home* was visited on a daily basis. Also, the Lord’s Supper was often taken at a fellowship meal. Therefore, while Acts 2:46 cannot be used to prove “bread breaking”



was the Lord's Supper, neither should it be excluded.

In 1 Corinthians 11:23,24 we find,

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took *bread*; and when He had given thanks, He *broke* it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In the early church "to gather together" and "to break bread" appear to be a standard formula for Christian meetings where the Lord's Supper was practiced.<sup>5</sup>

The weight of evidence seems to support F. F. Bruce's conclusion regarding Acts 20:7.

The statement that at Troas the travelers and their fellow Christians dwelling in that port met together for the breaking of the bread "upon the first day of the week" is the earliest unambiguous evidence we have for the Christian practice of gathering together on that day.<sup>6</sup>

To summarize: (1) This meeting was "on the first day of the week." (2) It was probably Sunday evening. (3) Luke says they were "gathered together to break bread," indicating the purpose of the meeting. (4) "Breaking bread" was probably the Lord's Supper. (5) This was a Christian church meeting. (6) It is the earliest strong evidence of Christians meeting on the first day of the week.

### **1 Corinthians 16:1,2**

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collection be made when I come.

This is an important verse because the instruction given this church is the same instruction Paul had given to a number of other Christian churches. This instruction includes specific mention of the first day of the week.



From my research I have been unable to find any *good* reason for Paul to specifically mention the first day of the week, *unless* this day held a degree of importance to the New Testament Christians.

The Greek construction “put aside and save” literally means, “put by himself.” However, it is not proof that it could not have been at a church meeting, although nothing is said about a church meeting or putting this money into the collection plate. Perhaps Paul was telling the believers to save *some* of their offering money at home *before* they went to church each Sunday. This would keep them from putting all their offering money into the local church expense. Therefore, when Paul came he would simply call for the money which the believers would by then have already saved up for the saints in Jerusalem. This hypothesis provides a possible reason for the facts in this verse.

In summary we have the following: (1) Paul saw some significance to the first day of the week. (2) Paul instructed all the churches of Galatia to follow the instruction given here. (3) The Greek construction indicates that the money probably was put aside privately.

### **Revelation 1:10**

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet . . .

At first this verse seems to say very little regarding the Sabbath or the first day of the week. This verse is found in a section of Scripture which is dealing with other subject matter. But what does it say? Really all it says is that John received a vision “on the Lord's day.” What did He mean? One can hardly use this text to form a theology of Sabbath or Sunday, rather this is a verse which must fit into that theology *and* it must *also* fit the history of the early church. This verse, for all practical purposes, will be



interpreted on the basis of other study and other conclusions.

The Saturday sabbatarian school of thought reasons like this. Here it says the Lord has a day. Matthew 12:8 (Mk. 2:27) says that "the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." Therefore, John must have been "in the Spirit" on the seventh-day Sabbath.<sup>7</sup>

Those who place significance on the first day of the week use the same reasoning, but instead of Sabbath being the Lord's day, they see the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection, as the Lord's day. While they do not have any specific Scripture which calls the first day of the week "the Lord's day," they point to the frequent mention of the first day of the week in connection with the risen Lord, and to extra-biblical use of the "Lord's day" in connection with the first day of the week.<sup>8</sup>

Which is correct? First we must note that the phrase "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" does not necessarily mean that the Sabbath is the Lord's day. Rather, as we saw in Chapter 7, the context shows that Jesus is *not* submitting Himself to old covenant Sabbath law but He is exercising His authority *over* Sabbath law. He makes this statement in the context of excusing His disciples' questionable Sabbath activities.

Second, we know from the historical record that the term "Lord's day" was a common title for Sunday.

It seems clear that by the end of the second century this [the Lord's day] (with its Latin equivalent *dies dominica*) was the ordinary designation of the weekly day of worship throughout the greater part of the Christian world.<sup>9</sup>

From the latter second century onwards it is clear that Sunday was the regular day of Christian worship everywhere, and there is no record of any controversy over whether worship should take place on Sunday.<sup>10</sup>

While we cannot be dogmatic, it appears that the weight



of evidence is in favor of accepting “The Lord’s day” in Revelation 1:10 as a reference to Sunday.

### **Chapter Summary**

1. Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week.
2. There was no mix-up in days at the time of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.
3. The women who were associated with Jesus felt it more important to keep the Sabbath “according to the commandment” than to anoint Jesus’ body.
4. Mary worshiped Jesus on resurrection Sunday.
5. Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to two of His disciples on the first day of the week.
6. Several times Jesus spoke peace to His disciples on the first day of the week.
7. Jesus commissioned His disciples on the first day of the week. “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”
8. On the first day of the week Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, “Receive you the Holy Spirit.”
9. On the first day of the week Jesus gave His disciples the authority to proclaim forgiveness.
10. Of the seven recorded post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, five of them were on the first day of the week.
11. Every time a day is mentioned in connection with the appearance of the risen Lord, it is *always* the first day of the week.
12. Pentecost, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, took place on the first day of the week, but that fact is not mentioned in Scripture.
13. The Christians in Troas “gathered together to break bread” on the first day of the week. This was probably a Sunday evening meeting where the Lord’s Supper was celebrated.
14. Paul told all the churches in the region of Galatia and



- Corinth to “put aside and save” money for the Jerusalem saints on “the first day of every week.”
15. John, when writing the book of Revelation, speaks of the “Lord’s day.” This may be a reference to Sunday.
  16. Every time the first day of the week is mentioned in the New Testament it is in connection with *believing Christians*.
  17. Every time the first day of the week is mentioned in the New Testament it is in a positive setting.
  18. There is no specific command to keep *any* day holy in the New Testament.
  19. There is no specific command to worship on the first day of the week in the New Testament.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, p. 852.

<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Max M. B. Turner, *The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts*, in *From Sabbath to Lord’s day*, p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, as quoted by F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament, The Book of Acts*, pp. 407, 408.

<sup>7</sup> See Desmond Ford, *The Forgotten Day*, p. 224.

<sup>8</sup> See R. J. Bauckham, *The Lord’s Day*, in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, pp. 224–250 for a thorough study of this verse.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.



## Chapter 17

### Sabbath in Crisis

*Crisis* comes from the Greek word *krisis*, which means judgment, and I have used it with this meaning. We have studied each Sabbath passage in its own contextual setting. It is now time to review our findings and to reach our conclusion—to pass judgment upon the topic of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath of Sinai is related to the “rest” of creation’s seventh day. This link is shown in three ways: by comparing the actions of Adam and Eve in Eden with the Sabbath commands, by the wording of the fourth commandment, and by the activities outlined for the sabbatical years and Jubilee. While there is a definite link between creation rest and the Sinaitic Sabbath, we must also recognize that the rest of creation’s seventh day was *not like* the rest of the Sinaitic Covenant. There is *no command* for man associated with the seventh-day rest of creation. The *relationship* that characterized the rest of that day should have, and would have, continued were it not for the sin of Adam and Eve. Thus we find that the record of creation’s seventh day does *not* have the formula “and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day.”

Scripture shows that the Sabbath *of the fourth commandment* was inseparably linked with the Sinaitic Covenant, the words of which are the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath commandment was in the *very center*



of the Sinaitic Covenant and was the *sign* of that covenant. While circumcision was the entrance sign for the sons of Israel, the Sabbath served as the repeatable sign Israel was commanded to “remember.” The Sabbath is related to every aspect of the Sinaitic Covenant: the covenant itself, the tabernacle of the covenant, the worship of the covenant, the people of the covenant, the land of the covenant, and the blessings and the cursings of the covenant. The laws for observance of the Sabbath are laws of the Sinaitic Covenant. *There are no laws for Sabbath observance outside of the Sinaitic Covenant. Therefore, if one is going to observe the Sabbath of Sinai, he must do so in accordance with the laws of Sinai.*

From the teaching and actions of Jesus we learned that He is the new covenant center. He took authority over the old covenant and was continually trying to move the Jewish leaders’ reference point of life judgment away from Sinai to Himself. It was the Sabbath activity of Jesus, coupled with His claim to be the son of God, which infuriated the Jewish leaders and caused the events which led to His crucifixion. Jesus knew the rigid framework of Judaism could not hold the dynamics of the new covenant gospel of justification by faith in Christ.

The New Testament defines the old or first covenant as the “tablets of stone” and the laws “written with ink.” The epistles, in contextual teaching, state that the Sinaitic Covenant is not binding in any way upon the Christian. This covenant, which was good for its time, has been superseded by the new, better covenant. The new covenant law of love interpreted by the New Testament writings and applied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit far surpasses the laws given to Israel. Scripture makes it clear, however, that the *moral principles* upon which the Sinaitic Covenant laws were based are included in the *moral principles* of the new covenant. However, in the new covenant there is a different administration of the



moral principles, and the new covenant has different signs. Baptism in the new covenant takes the place of circumcision in the old, and the Lord's Supper in the new covenant takes the place of the Sabbath in the old.

Under the new covenant the emphasis is no longer on sign and symbol, rather it is on reality and relationship. There are no long lists of minutely detailed laws, rather the new covenant is characterized by general principles which have application to *all nations*, not just the sons of Israel. The epistles teach that Christians can add nothing to the righteousness provided for them "in Christ." Those who seek to add their own works of obedience to the perfect, finished work of Christ by keeping any of the observances of the old covenant are in serious danger of falling from grace. The new covenant writings show one cannot pick and choose among the old covenant laws. If one is seeking to be under Sinaitic law, he must be under the whole law. However, to do this is to fall from grace.

There is no biblical evidence which proves the Sabbath of the seventh day was transferred to the first day of the week. While there are *many important events which transpired on the first day of the week*, there is no biblical command to keep it holy. Nevertheless, it appears that the first day of the week did have significance to New Testament believers because of the meaningful events which happened on that day. It is necessary that Christians have a time to worship. It is necessary that time be given to pursue the things of God, yet the first day should never be seen in the same light as the Sabbath of the old covenant. The emphasis is on *what* happens rather than on *when* it happens.

There is no *discussion* regarding the Sabbath in the book of Acts, rather the discussion is on the topic of circumcision. This is to be expected because circumcision was the entrance sign for the old covenant community and



*the Sabbath did not apply unless one was a member of the covenant community.*

Nearly every ceremony in the old covenant in some way pointed forward to the work of Christ. The seventh-day Sabbath is no exception. While it pointed back to the perfect relationship which existed between God and man on Eden's seventh day, it also pointed forward to the time when that relationship would be restored. The writer of Hebrews unequivocally shows that the rest which remains *for the Christian* is not the seventh-day Sabbath of Sinai, nor is it the "rest" which Israel experienced in the land of Canaan nor during the time of David. Rather, the rest of the new covenant is the "rest" of a restored relationship between man and God similar to the rest of creation's seventh day which one *enters by believing*.

All the Sinaitic Sabbaths—seventh-day Sabbaths, seasonal sabbaths, sabbatical years and Jubilee—seem to have been like small oases in the desert where the sons of Israel pretended they were back in the Garden of Eden. These Sabbaths not only pointed *back* to that seventh-day rest of creation, but they pointed *forward* to the restored relationship which was to take place within the new covenant, namely the fellowship of the Holy Spirit indwelling the heart of the believer who is saved by grace. These sabbaths served a very important function in giving purpose, direction and hope to the life of Israel. But like the dozens of other pointers, which were also shadows of good things to come, their value ended in the presence of the Creator. Jesus drew all these old covenant signs and shadows of hope to Himself.

The Pharisees demonstrated the heartbreaking paradox of old covenant Sabbath law. The laws that were designed to point forward to the open fellowship between man and God were the very laws which blinded their eyes to the present reality of the Creator standing in their midst. Jesus said,



You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life (Jn. 5:38,39).

The actions of the Pharisees can be likened to a person driving from the East Coast of the U.S. to visit California's Yosemite Valley. For thousands of miles this traveler has been following a road map to Yosemite. During this time he becomes so intent on watching the map—lest he make a wrong turn—that when he reaches Yosemite he fails to see the beauty of the country. With one eye on the road and the other eye on the map he drives through Yosemite Valley without ever seeing El Capitan, Half Dome, and Yosemite Falls. Finding a parking place, with his eyes still glued to his packet of instructions, he reads about the beautiful park but never leaves the seat of his car to personally walk the trails, never lifts his eyes to the majesty above.

The map and trail guide served important functions. But upon arrival at the destination it is time to put the map down and look up. So it is with the Sabbath. Rather than seek to keep a *day* holy let us put the day down and step into the arms of our holy *Creator*. Let us enter "today" into fellowship, into a "rest" which *remains* for those who have believed.

Jesus was continually seeking those who would come to *Him*. "Come unto *Me* all you who are weary and heavy laden" (Mt. 11:28). "Follow *Me*" was his often-repeated phrase to those who were seeking to obey God.

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (Jn. 7:37,38).

New covenant worship is not concerned with times and places. The woman of Samaria said to Jesus,

"Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought



to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father . . . an hour is coming and *now is*, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in *spirit* and *truth*; for such the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit; and *those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" (Jn. 4:20–24).

To understand that God is actually seeking people like you and me to worship Him fills one with a feeling of both humility and tremendous self-worth!

He jealously desires the spirit which He has made to dwell in us (Jas. 4:5).

The "sabbatismos" (Gr.) rest of the new covenant is better than the "sabbaton" (Gr.) rest of the old covenant for it deals with the *reality* to which the old covenant Sabbath only *prefigured*. It moves from *observance* to *experience*.

### Do This in Remembrance of Me

Jesus developed a close relationship with His disciples during His three-and-a-half-year ministry. They had come to believe in Him as the Messiah. They had learned to trust His wisdom and power in times of sickness and emergency as well as in everyday life. They had walked with Him, talked with Him, and listened to His teaching.

Just before His death, and resulting physical separation from His disciples, Jesus chose a ceremony by which His disciples could express their continued faith in Him. In the days and years to come this ceremony would also demonstrate the continued presence of Jesus, even though He would be invisible to the gathered assembly.

To express His deep feeling of love to His disciples, Jesus chose a simple meal of bread and wine. Through the ensuing years this has become variously known as the Lord's Supper, Holy Eucharist, or the communion



service. During the Last Supper with His disciples Jesus inaugurated this service using these words, "*Do this in remembrance of Me.*"

And having taken some bread, when He had given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; *do this in remembrance of Me.*" And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is *the new covenant* in my blood" (Lk. 22:19,20).

By partaking in the Lord's Supper, Christians demonstrate their continued belief and trust in Jesus Christ as their Covenant Keeper.

### **Bread and the presence of the Lord**

From its very beginning the Lord's Supper has been associated with the *presence of the risen Lord*. On Resurrection Sunday two grieving, confused disciples were on their way to Emmaus. As they sorrowfully made their way along the trail they were joined by a fellow traveler. When they arrived at their destination they invited the traveler to eat with them and stay overnight. The traveler accepted their invitation. During the evening meal this traveler picked up the bread and began to break it and suddenly they realized this traveler was none other than the risen Lord. It was *during the breaking of the bread that they recognized the presence of the risen Lord*, the very symbol He had given to His disciples when He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me"!

And it came about that when He had reclined at table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight (Lk. 24:30,31).

Later, to emphasize the connection between the breaking of the bread and the presence of the risen Lord, Luke records,



And they began to relate their experiences on the road and how *He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread*. And while they were telling these things, *He Himself stood in their midst* (Lk. 24:35,36).

Today, during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the same Presence of the living Lord is realized in the heart of the believing disciple as he partakes of the *bread* and the *wine*. The bread is a symbol of Christ's body which He gave for us. Therefore He said,

Take, eat; this is my body (Mt. 26:26).

In the eastern world bread is considered the staff of life. Jesus took this well-known necessity of life and made it a symbol of His body, given for the life of the world. In the symbol of the bread we are also to remember the experience of the manna in the wilderness. Jesus said,

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh (Jn. 6:48-51).

Wine, on the other hand, is symbolized in Scripture in two ways. It is both a symbol of joy and a symbol of God's wrath. The wine of the Lord's Supper should be seen in both ways.

### **Wine as joy**

In the book of Psalms we read of the Lord's blessings and care over all His works in these words.

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth, and *wine which makes man's*



*heart glad*, so that he may make his face glisten with oil, and food which sustains man's heart (Ps. 104:14,15).

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus' public ministry started at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. The joy of the celebration was interrupted when the wine ran out. Jesus met this need by miraculously providing some one hundred and twenty gallons of the finest wine (Jn. 2: 6–11).

## Wine as wrath

And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her *the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath* (Rev. 16:19).

If any one worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he also will drink of *the wine of the wrath of God*, which is mixed in full strength in the *cup of His anger* . . . (Rev. 14:10).

Doubtless the association between wine and the wrath of God sprang from the custom of treading the winepress during the grape crush. People coming from the winepress looked like they had come from a bloody battle.

One truth Jesus communicates in giving us the cup—a symbol of God's wrath—is that if we partake of the cup *now* we will escape the *coming wrath* which will be poured out on those who reject God's invitation of mercy. It is a symbolic way of teaching,

He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and *does not come into judgment*, but has passed out of death into life (Jn. 5:24).

The communion wine is a symbolic analogy of a vaccination. Just a little sip of wine now makes us immune from the coming wrath. We are reminded how the blood sprinkled on the doorposts the night of the passover protected those “under the blood” from the destroying angel. In the same way the blood of Christ,



symbolized by the communion wine, will protect us from the coming wrath pictured by the Revelator in these words:

And the angel swung his sickle to the earth, and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great *wine press of the wrath of God*. And the wine press was trodden *outside the city*, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles (Rev. 14:19,20).

### At the Last Supper Jesus

took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is *My blood of the covenant*, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26:27,28).

When Jesus speaks of "My blood of the covenant" it is rich with meaning. At Sinai Moses

took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Ex. 24:7,8).

When Jesus speaks of "My blood of the covenant" He understands the violent and sacrificial death He is about to undergo as He inaugurates with His people the new covenant. As the Passover Lamb, His blood will soon be "poured out." <sup>1</sup>

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus began to feel the weight of sin being placed upon Him.

My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death . . . And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this *cup* pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Mt. 26:38,39).

Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people



through His own blood, suffered *outside the gate* (Heb. 13:12).

As mentioned before, the Gospel of John is full of details which provide insight into the deeper message of this Gospel. John records the public ministry of Jesus starting with a joyous wedding celebration where He provided the “best” wine. It is no accident that John records the end of Jesus’ ministry with His drinking “sour wine” given to Him on the branch of hyssop—the same instrument used to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to the lintel and doorposts.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I am thirsty.” A jar full of *sour wine* was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the *sour wine* upon a branch of hyssop, and brought it up to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the *sour wine*, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit (Jn. 19:28–30).

It was the sin of Adam and Eve which brought to an end that perfect “rest” of creation. It was because of this sin that God “drove the man out” and placed the cherubim with the flaming sword to guard the gate of the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). It was because of Adam’s sin that the ground was cursed and brought forth thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:17–19). It was when Adam sinned that he began to “work” (Gen. 3:19).

At this time God began to *work* for man’s salvation. His work, the work of redemption, came to an end when Jesus, wearing the crown of thorns “suffered outside the gate” in Adam’s place. This work of redemption ended when Jesus said, “It is finished,” and died for the sins of the world.

For the Christian, celebrating the Lord’s Supper is a time of deep and meaningful reflection. We learn to value ourselves by the price paid for our redemption. While the signs of the covenant are *not moral in themselves* they are



nonetheless *invaluable to the covenant community*. Celebrating the Lord's Supper serves as a renewing of the covenant. We express our belief and trust in the risen Lord, who fulfilled the covenant requirements for us. And we rehearse *His covenant promises to us*. More than that, during the communion service we *experience the presence of the risen Lord*.

Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood *of the covenant*, which is to be shed on behalf of many for *forgiveness of sins* (Mt. 26:26–28).

For those living in the new covenant the judgment is clear. It is no longer "remember the Sabbath *day* to keep it holy," but

**DO THIS IN  
REMEMBRANCE  
OF ME.**

### Evaluation

As we mentioned in Chapter 1, Sabbath understanding can be categorized in three main areas, recognizing that there are varying interpretations within each group: Sunday sabbatarianism, Saturday sabbatarianism and non-sabbatarianism. Perhaps a better heading for each group would be transfer/modification, reformation/continuation and fulfillment/transformation, respectively. Which one of these understandings best fits the biblical evidence?



### Transfer/modification

This is perhaps the most popular understanding. It teaches that the seventh-day Sabbath of the Old Testament was *transferred* to Sunday in the New Testament and the rules for Sabbath keeping have been *modified*. Even though many Christian interpreters have supported this motif, or some variation of it, it is my judgment that this interpretation has the least *biblical* support. First, there is no command *in Scripture* which would warrant the transfer of the Sabbath, and all that it stood for, to Sunday. Second, there are few, if any, biblical guidelines for a modification of Sabbath observance. One must, however, recognize that within *church history* this view is well supported.

### Reformation/continuation

This has been a minority view well documented in Christian history. This view holds that the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment is as valid today as it was at Sinai. Those who hold this view believe the Sabbath encounters of Jesus were designed to bring *reform* to the Sabbath and free it from the extra-biblical rules which Jewish tradition had placed upon it. This view holds that the seventh-day Sabbath is to continue into the new covenant and even into the age to come. It has some biblical evidence to support it, but it has several weaknesses. First, it does not take seriously the differences between the covenants. It ignores the clear biblical statements which show that Christians are no longer under the old covenant. Second, because it ignores the differences between the covenants, it is faced with the dilemma of Sabbath observance. While it wants to hold many of the Old Testament statements regarding Sabbath as normative for the Christian, it is at a loss to show why *all* the old covenant statements regarding Sabbath



observance are not valid. Third, history has shown that often those holding this motif struggle with legalism.

### Fulfillment/transformation

This view holds that the Sabbath of the old covenant was *fulfilled* by Jesus and the themes of symbolism carried by the Old Testament Sabbath have been *transformed* into other vehicles in the new covenant. While aspects of this view have been supported within the Christian church throughout its history, it seems to have been most clearly articulated in recent times.<sup>2</sup>

It is my judgment that this motif is the only view which harmonizes with *all* of Scripture. There were three main streams of truth which were symbolically carried by the Sabbath: creation rest, the sign of the covenant, and the day for worship. Notice how the new covenant takes these ideas and transforms them.

The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was a symbol of the rest of creation's seventh day. The new covenant shows that Jesus *fulfilled* this concept of rest. *He* is now the one that *provides true rest*. Hebrews 3 and 4 show that in the new covenant God's creation rest *cannot* be the seventh-day Sabbath and *must* be the eschatological rest of grace.

The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was the "remembrance sign" of the Sinaitic Covenant. In the new covenant it is clear that for the Christian the "remembrance sign" is now the Lord's Supper.

The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was a day of worship. However, it is important to note that the concept of the Sabbath *as day of worship* is not in the old covenant Sabbath statements themselves. Rather, the Sabbath was seen as a day of *physical* rest. It was not until *after* the Babylonian captivity when the synagogue was instituted that the Sabbath became a regular day for worship and religious teaching.<sup>3</sup> While there are hints of special



Sabbath activities, such as special sacrifices, etc., the concept is in germ form. In like manner the new covenant lacks specific commands for worship on the first day of the week. There are many *indicators* that the first day of the week held special significance, but the regular practice of Christian worship on Sunday came many years after the death of Christ.

The following diagram illustrates the fulfillment/transfer motif:

**O.C. Sabbath concepts      vs      N.C. Transformation**

**Creation rest**

Physical rest (Ex. 20)      ➔      Rest of grace (Heb. 4)

**Covenant sign**

Sabbath (Ex. 31)      ➔      Lord's Supper (Lk. 21)

**Day of worship**

Seventh day (history)      ➔      First day (history)

Therefore we see that the fulfillment/transformation motif takes seriously *all* the scriptural evidence regarding the Sabbath and its meaning and shows how this meaning was fulfilled and/or transformed by Christ.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> See D. A. Carson, *Commentary on Matthew, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, pp. 536,537.

<sup>2</sup> For a scholarly and well-footnoted study of this topic see *From Sabbath to Sunday*, Edited by D. A. Carson, Zondervan.

<sup>3</sup> See C. Rowland, *A Summary of the Sabbath Observance in Judaism at the Beginning of the Christian Era*, in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, pp. 50,51.



It is not a good principle of interpretation to accept and apply part of a verse of Scripture and ignore the rest.



## Chapter 18

# SABBATH ARGUMENTS

### Introduction

Notwithstanding the biblical evidence we have already discovered, it is necessary for us to carefully look at several arguments from the sabbatarian point of view and honestly evaluate them.

### The Sabbath and the Fall of Jerusalem

Sabbatarians often use Matthew 24:20 to support the ongoing validity of the seventh-day Sabbath of Sinai. Speaking of the coming destruction of Jerusalem Jesus said,

But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.

We should note that the context of the teaching is *not* dealing with the Sabbath, rather He is answering the question the disciples asked in Matthew 24:3:

Tell us, when will these things [destruction of the temple] be and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?

Here is the best of what I have been able to find on this text.



## The destruction of Jerusalem to be like the abomination of desolation

By the wording of this passage Jesus is making a clear connection between the destruction of Jerusalem and events surrounding the abomination of desolation, the experience of Antiochus Epiphanes, who erected an idol of the Olympian Zeus over the altar of burnt offerings in 167 B.C. Antiochus defiled the Jerusalem sanctuary, sacrificed pigs on its altars, burned all the books of the law he could find and killed many loyal Jews. These events are recorded in 1 Maccabees. This noncanonical book is included in the Jerusalem Bible. The first nine chapters of this book are well worth reading. I have listed below a verse or two from the context of Matthew 24:20 with a corresponding section from 1 Maccabees. At times I have quoted from the historian Josephus, who lived in the first century A.D. Notice the close parallel in wording, ideas, and content.

### “*Abomination of desolation*” in Holy Place

Therefore when you see the *abomination of desolation* which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the Holy Place (*let the reader understand*) (Mt. 24:15).

The King (Antiochus) erected the *abomination of desolation* above the altar (1 Mac. 1:57).

The Jewish historian, Josephus, in commenting on this incident says:

For so it was, that the temple was made desolate by Antiochus, and so continued for three years . . . And this desolation came to pass according to the prophecy of Daniel, which was given four hundred and eighty years before; for he declared that the Macedonians would dissolve that worship (for some) time (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XII, Chapter VII, Paragraph 6).



***Leave possessions and flee to the mountains***

Then let those who are in Judea *flee to the mountains*; let him who is on the housetop *not go down to get the things out that are in his house*; and let him who is in the field *not turn back to get his cloak* (Mt. 24:16–18).

Then Mattathias went through the town, shouting at the top of his voice, “Let everyone who has a fervour for the Law and takes his stand on the covenant come out and follow me.” Then *he fled with his sons into the hills, leaving all their possessions behind in the town* (1 Mac. 2:27,28).

***Woe to women and babies***

But *woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days* (Mt. 24:19).

Her *babies have been slaughtered in her streets, her young men by the enemy's sword . . .* Mattathias and his sons tore their garments, put on sackcloth, and observed deep mourning (1 Mac. 2:9,14).

***Pray that it not be in winter or on the Sabbath***

But pray that your flight may *not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath* (Mt. 24:20).

And many . . . went down to the desert and stayed there, taking with them their sons, their wives and their cattle . . . A strong detachment went after them . . . preparing to attack them *on the sabbath day . . .* “Enough of this! Come out and do as the king [Antiochus] orders and you shall be spared.” But they answered, “We refuse to come out, and we are not going to obey the king's orders and so profane *the sabbath day*.” The others at once went into action, but they offered no opposition; not a stone was thrown, there was no barricading of the hiding places. They only said, “Let us all die innocent; let heaven and earth bear witness that you are massacring us with no pretense of justice.” The attack was pressed home *on the sabbath itself*, and they were slaughtered, with their wives and children and cattle, to the number of one thousand persons. When the news reached Mattathias and his friends, they mourned bitterly for the victims, and said to one another, “If we all do as our



brothers have done, and refuse to fight the pagans for our lives and institutions, they will only destroy us the sooner from the earth." So then and there they came to this decision, "If anyone attacks us on the sabbath day, whoever he may be, we will resist him; we must not all be killed, as our brothers were in the hiding places." (1Mac.1:57; 2:29,32-41).

When the abomination of desolation was set up it was *winter*, December 8. (See footnote in the Jerusalem Bible at 1 Mac. 1:57.)

### *A great tribulation*

For then there will be *a great tribulation*, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall (Mt. 24:21).

First Maccabees 1-7 records the terrible three-and-a-half-year war between Antiochus and the loyal Jews. Antiochus finally came to his end, so the Jews cleansed their sanctuary and restarted the morning and evening sacrifice.

### Sabbath keepers at the destruction of Jerusalem

Jesus foresaw there would be many people still observing the Sabbath when Jerusalem would be destroyed. Obviously there would be many Jews who were not Christians keeping the Sabbath. On the other hand, as we have pointed out in Chapter 11, there were also many Jewish Christians who were still observing the Sabbath. We know this from the record in the book of Acts.

But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees *who had believed*, stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them *to observe the Law of Moses*" (Acts 15:5).

You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those *who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law*; and they have been told about you,



that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs (Acts 21:20).

There were many thousands of Christians who continued to follow "Moses," practice circumcision, and live according to "the customs" which certainly included Sabbath observance.

### **Matthew written to Jewish Christians**

It is interesting to note that Matthew is the only Gospel writer to include "Pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath." Mark simply says, "Pray that it may not happen in the winter (Mk. 13:18). He includes no mention of Sabbath. Luke's account of Jesus' Olivet address does not mention either the Sabbath or winter. Most scholars believe Matthew was written specifically to the Jewish-Christian community.

The Gospel of St. Matthew was intended for Jewish Christians (Wikenhauser, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 195).

This Gospel [Matthew] has a strong Judaic background (Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 161).

The gospels of Mark and Luke, however, are intended for Gentile audiences. (See Wikenhauser pp. 169, 219.)

### **Conclusions**

What, then, does Matthew 24:20 teach regarding the Sabbath? "But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath." Considering the evidence above leads us to the following conclusions:

First, Jesus may have mentioned the Sabbath in connection with the other specifics, such as babies, winter, and fleeing, to help the reader realize the close connection between the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the abomination of desolation which had taken place under the



persecution of Antiochus. Note that Matthew says, “*Let the reader understand,*” indicating that special insight would be needed.

Second, Jesus asked his followers to pray that the flight from the destruction of Jerusalem would not happen on Sabbath because He knew there would still be many thousands of people (Jews and Jewish Christians) still keeping the Sabbath in Jerusalem and He knew that fleeing on the Sabbath would create extra hardship. They would have to choose between breaking Sabbath law or being massacred as did the Jews in the time of Antiochus.

Third, the fact that Matthew is the *only* Gospel writer to include the mention of Sabbath in Christ’s Olivet discourse, coupled with the fact that his Gospel was specifically written for Jewish Christians, indicates that this admonition was not needed by the Gentile Christians. Acts 15 and 21 indicate that thousands of Jewish Christians were still zealous for the law and still observed the customs of Moses, which would include Sabbath keeping. This would also explain why *other* Gospel writers who wrote for Gentile audiences did *not* include Christ’s mention of Sabbath because the Gentile Christians would not need this counsel: they would not be in Jerusalem nor would they be concerned about Sabbath observance. (See Chapter 11.)

## Evaluation

All of the above conclusions fit perfectly with the other biblical evidence we have discovered. Therefore we may conclude that Matthew 24:20 indicates many would still be keeping the Sabbath at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem but it *cannot* be used as evidence that *all* Christians were observing, or should be required to observe, the Sabbath.



## The Sabbath of the Lord

Some use the following reasoning to support the continued observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. “The Bible clearly states that the seventh day is ‘the Sabbath of the *Lord*.’ If it is His day, then it should be observed by all His people. We, as Christians, are His people; therefore, we ought to observe His day.”

The biblical support for this argument is as follows:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath *of the Lord your God* (Ex. 20:8–10).

This argument is based upon two assumptions: (1) The Sabbath belongs to the Lord. (2) If something is stated as belonging to the Lord, then it becomes obligatory.

It is certainly a scriptural fact that the seventh-day Sabbath is said to be “the sabbath of the Lord your God.” However, if we are going to argue that the seventh-day Sabbath is binding *because* it belongs to the Lord, then to be consistent, we must also argue for the other old covenant convocations which come with the same credentials. Note the following:

The *Lord's appointed times* which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—*My appointed times* are these . . . These are the *appointed times of the Lord* (Lev. 23:2,4,37).

Then follows a listing of the “Lord’s appointed times,” which not only include the seventh-day Sabbath, but also the seven annual sabbaths, or feasts.

[It] is the *Lord's Passover* (Lev. 23:5).

He shall bring the tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering . . . and offer it up in smoke on the altar, with the *offerings of the Lord* by fire (Lev. 5:11,12).

. . . present it as an offering to the Lord before the *tabernacle of the Lord* (Lev. 17:4).

A sacrifice of *peace offerings* . . . *the holy thing of the Lord* (Lev. 19:5–8).



Take the *grain offering* that is left over from the *Lord's offerings* by fire . . . (Lev. 10:12).

A *first-born* belongs to the Lord . . . it is the *Lord* (Lev. 27:26).

The Levitical priests . . . shall eat the *Lord's offerings* (Deut. 18:1).

## Evaluation

If we are going to observe the seventh-day Sabbath because it is “the sabbath *of the Lord*,” then to be consistent we must also be willing to observe the seven annual sabbaths, the grain offerings, the burnt offerings, the tabernacle services, the peace offerings, and the offering of the firstborn, *all of which are said to be “of the Lord.”* Therefore the above reasoning does not support continued Sabbath observance.

## The Sabbath in the New Earth

“For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me,” declares the Lord, “so your offspring and your name will endure. And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says the Lord (Isa. 66:23).

It has often been argued that if the Sabbath will be kept in the new earth, then that is evidence it should be kept here and now. Is this good reasoning? This quotation from Isaiah and the argument derived from it deserve our careful consideration.

Let us look closely at the argument. It is based upon two assumptions: (1) that in the new earth all mankind will keep the Sabbath; (2) that because all mankind will keep the Sabbath in the new earth, they should keep it now.



**The perspective of old covenant prophecy is limited**

The first assumption appears to be valid if we take Isaiah 66:23 at face value. But before we do so, however, we should consider an important characteristic of Old Testament prophecy. The old covenant prophets, when describing the age to come, described it through *old covenant eyes*. In other words, *old covenant eschatology is set forth in old covenant terminology*. Here are just a few samplings to illustrate.

In Isaiah 66:20,21, which is the immediate context of Isaiah 66:23, we read,

“Then they shall bring all your brethren [Israelites assumed] from all the nations [Israel was in captivity at this point] as a grain offering to the Lord, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules, and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem,” says the Lord, “just as the *sons of Israel* bring their grain offerings in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord. I will also take some of them [the returning Israelites] as *priests* and for *Levites*,” says the Lord (Isa. 66:20–21).

Will the levitical priesthood be restored in the new earth? The purpose of the levitical priesthood was to perform the many ceremonies which *pointed forward* to Christ. In the presence of God, there would surely be no need for the restoration of this old covenant priestly function. In Isaiah 65:17–25 we have a prophetic description of the “new heavens and a new earth.” In these verses we note the mention of “Jerusalem,” “My holy mountain,” “My people” and “My chosen ones.” This is not to say the new earth will not have a “Jerusalem” or the people there will not be the Lord’s “chosen ones,” but what must be seen is that the prophet sees this new earth through “old covenant eyes.”

**Should new earth observances be practiced now?**

First, if it is to be argued that the Sabbath should be



kept today because in an Old Testament prophetic description of the new earth the inhabitants are said to bow down before the Lord from Sabbath to Sabbath, then it must also be argued that new moon celebrations should be observed today for they too are said to be observed in the "new earth." It is not a valid method of interpretation to use only half of the data in a text while ignoring the other half. It was pointed out in the chapter "Sabbath Relationships" that the seventh-day Sabbath is often mentioned with the new moon celebrations in old covenant services. The fact that the Sabbath and the new moon celebrations are mentioned together in Isaiah only reinforces the fact that old covenant prophets described the age to come using old covenant terminology.

Second, if the activities described in these verses are to be observed now, then we could argue that the Levitical priesthood should also be observed now. But there is abundant biblical evidence showing the Levitical priesthood should *not* be restored now. One of the themes of the Book of Hebrews is that the ministry of Christ far supersedes the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 5–7).

Third, even if a certain practice may be observed in the new earth it *does not, in and of itself*, mean that it should be practiced now. Isaiah pictures the new earth with the wolf and the lamb grazing together. He pictures the lion eating straw like an ox (Isa. 65:25). However, it is *not* a currently recommended practice to pasture wolves and sheep together! Nor would we advise zookeepers to feed their lions straw! The Old Testament prophet pictured the the world to come with a little boy leading a leopard (Isa. 11:6) and a nursing child playing by the hole of a cobra (Isa. 11:8), but these are *not* safe practices now. In the same way it is not good interpretation to find a practice which may be observed in the "new earth" and urge its practice today.



## Conclusion

Those who make an argument for the present observance of the Sabbath from Isaiah 66:23 are left on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand they must see this verse as “colored” by the limited perspective of the old covenant prophet, or, on the other hand, they must also be willing to argue for the observance of new moon celebrations, the restoration of the Levitical priesthood, which according to Paul would mean placing oneself back under the old covenant thus causing one to fall from grace. For these reasons we must conclude that Isaiah 66:23 is not a valid support for present-day Sabbath observance.

## Sabbath at Creation

There is a relationship between the rest of Eden's seventh day and the Sabbath of Sinai in the biblical data we have studied. There are some sabbatarians, however, who want to push this relationship to make them fundamentally *equal*, seeking support for the continued observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. They do this by arguing that the Sabbath *of the fourth commandment* was actually instituted by God *at creation*. Then they argue that all the involved relationships between the seventh-day Sabbath and the old covenant are meaningless because Sabbath observance *for man* had its origin at creation. Their reasoning is based upon a comparison of Exodus 20:11 with Genesis 2:3.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (Ex. 20:11).

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (Gen. 2:3).

Comparing these two references, it seems to indicate the



“Sabbath day” (of the Sinaitic Covenant) started in Eden.

To try to put Adam and Eve under the stipulations of the Sinaitic Covenant Sabbath laws is an exercise in futility. Rather, as I have pointed out in “Reflections of Eden” (Chapter 4) and “The Rest That Remains” (Chapter 15), the Bible indicates that Eden’s seventh-day rest served as a *pattern* for Sinaitic Sabbath laws. This pattern was a reminder of the perfect relationship which existed between God, man and creation before the fall.

At this point let me give a brief summary of the evidence already discovered in our study which shows that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment was *not* given before the time of Moses.

First, Scripture is very clear that the covenant made with Israel at Sinai was *not made with the fathers*. (See Chapter 4.) The Sabbath was the very center of that covenant. Second, the evidence of the New Testament is weighted heavily against required Sabbath observance. (See Chapter 11.) Third, Hebrews 3 and 4 make it clear that the “Sabbath rest” for the Christian *cannot* be the seventh-day Sabbath of Sinai. (See Chapter 15.)

In addition to these reasons there are two more which have been used. The first is the argument from silence. Arguments from silence are never strong arguments but they do carry some weight as we pointed out in Chapter 11. In this connection it is important to note that there is *a great amount of detail* regarding the life of Abraham, even more regarding Jacob and his sons, but *never once* is the Sabbath even alluded to. If the Sabbath was instituted for all mankind at Creation and Sabbath observance was essentially the same as outlined in the Sinaitic Covenant, it seems unlikely it would not be mentioned or alluded to at least a few times in the thousands of years before the Exodus.

A second reason that some have used is based upon the fact that there are several anachronisms in the writings of



Moses. Genesis was written by Moses. Whether he wrote this book before or after the Exodus is open to speculation. Whether he did or did not use previously existing source documents does not really change the fact that Genesis was written from *his perspective in time*. Several anachronisms are to be found in the book of Genesis as in well as in the rest of Scripture. Anachronisms are statements that are out of time with their immediate context. Following are four illustrations of anachronisms, all from the writings of Moses.

First, In Genesis 2:10–14 we read of the land of Cush. This was a well-known name for the land of Egypt *in the days of Moses*. We also read of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. While we do not argue with the probability that the Garden of Eden was in this area of the world, nevertheless, it seems that Moses is expressing this truth in a language that could be understood from the *post-flood perspective of his day*.

A second example of an anachronism is found in Genesis 2:23,24. In context God has just created Eve from Adam's rib.

And the man [Adam] said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man." *For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

Most modern translations end the quotation of Adam after verse 23. Verse 24 appears to be an anachronism, or commentary by Moses, which shows where the custom of marriage *in Moses day* had its origin.

We find a third possible example of an anachronism in Genesis 3:20.

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, *because she was the mother of all living*.

Moses says here that Adam named his wife "Life" (that is what Eve means) *because* she was the "mother of all



living.” However, when Adam named his wife Eve (Life) she was not a mother at all. It appears the reason for Adam naming his wife Eve, “because she was the mother of all living,” is a commentary *from the time perspective of Moses*.

The fourth example of an anachronism is much easier to follow. Exodus 16 records the history of the Israelites in the wilderness of Sin *before* they come to Mt. Sinai. In Exodus 16:34 we read,

As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it [the jar of manna] *before the Testimony*, to be kept.

However, the Testimony (a term for the Ten Commandments, see Ex. 31:18) *had not yet been given nor had the ark or tabernacle been made*. Moses inserts, *out of time sequence*, the fact that Aaron did obey the command of the Lord which was given on the occasion of the manna. He could not, however, have actually carried out this command until several weeks or months later. Please understand I am not saying these verses are less inspired or less authoritative than other parts of Scripture, but rather, they must be seen for what they are—anachronisms, statements which are out of time with their immediate context.

Some have argued that the blessing and sanctifying of the seventh day is also an anachronism. Their support for this is twofold: the fact that there are other anachronisms in the writings of Moses and the argument of silence mentioned above. If one accepts this reasoning, then the record of God blessing the seventh day as *recorded* by Moses in Genesis 2 *actually took place at Sinai*.

While there are several anachronisms in Genesis, I reject the anachronistic theory in reference to the Sabbath, for Scripture emphasizes the blessedness of that first seventh day. At the same time, however, there is strong biblical support *against* the view that makes the Sabbath of Sinai the same as Eden’s seventh-day rest.



## Jesus and Sabbath Reform

Some have argued that Jesus' Sabbath miracles and encounters on the Sabbath must be seen as Sabbath reform. Then they argue that He would not have reformed the Sabbath if it were soon to pass away.<sup>1</sup> Jesus did, however, bring reform to other aspects of the old covenant, which soon *did* pass away. Both at the beginning and end of Jesus' ministry He sought to bring reform to the temple services (Jn. 2:13–22, Mt. 21:12–17). Yet at His death the “veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Mt. 27:51), indicating that *from God's perspective* the temple services were over. As Jesus approached Jerusalem a few days before His death he said,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, *your house is being left to you desolate.* (Mt. 23:37,38).

Jesus sought to bring reform regarding the way people were offering sacrifice in connection with interpersonal relationships.

If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering (Mt. 5:23,24).

We should also question the very hypothesis upon which this argument is based. In the Sabbath activity and teaching of Jesus, the emphasis was not in bringing reform to the Sabbath as much as it was in showing that His *work* of Jubilee ministry was not to be restricted by old covenant (or rabbinical) Sabbath law. While in a sense Jesus did bring reform to the Sabbath, His main emphasis was in *fulfilling* the Sabbath by *providing the true rest*, of which the Sabbath was a type.



## Chapter Summary

1. Matthew 24:20
  - a. Jesus showed there would be a close association between the abomination of desolation by Antiochus Epiphanes and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This is seen in close parallel between Matthew 24:25–21 and 1 Maccabees 1–7 and may account for His mention of the Sabbath in these verses.
  - b. Jesus foresaw that many people, Jews and Jewish Christians, would be observing the seventh-day Sabbath at the destruction of Jerusalem.
  - c. The Gospel of Matthew is specifically written to people of Jewish background. While all the Synoptic Gospels record Christ's Olivet discourse, Matthew is the *only one* to record the mention of the Sabbath. The reason the other Gospel writers did not include mention of the Sabbath may indicate that the Gentile Christians to whom they were writing were not observing the Sabbath, therefore they did not need that instruction.
  - d. Matthew 24:20 cannot be used to prove continued Sabbath observance for all Christians.
2. The reasoning which says that because the Sabbath is said to be "of the Lord" and therefore should be kept by the "Lord's people" is invalid.
  - a. Many old covenant practices are said to be "of the Lord."
  - b. To argue for one would be to argue for all.
3. Isaiah 66:23 cannot be used in support of present-day Sabbath observance.
  - a. Old Testament prophets picture the age to come in old covenant terminology.



- b. New earth practices cannot be used as guides for present-day behavior.
  - c. If one is going to observe the Sabbath today because it will be observed in the new earth, then to be consistent, he must also observe the new moon celebrations, for they are mentioned in the same verse, and he must also argue for the reinstitution of the Levitical priesthood.
4. The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was not given at the time of creation.
- a. The laws for Sabbath keeping would have been without meaning to Adam and Eve.
  - b. While there is considerable detail regarding the life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons, never is the Sabbath mentioned or even alluded to.
  - c. The covenant God made with Israel at Sinai was not made with the “fathers” of Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). The fact that the Sabbath was the seal of that covenant gives evidence that the fathers did not have the Sabbath.
  - d. Some have shown that there are a number of anachronisms in the writings of Moses. They believe that while the Genesis record states the seventh day was blessed, the time of the blessing occurred at Sinai.
  - e. The Biblical evidence indicates the Sinaitic Sabbath was patterned after the rest of Eden’s seventh day but they are not equal.
5. While Jesus, in a sense, did bring Sabbath reform, He also reformed other old covenant practices which were soon to pass away. His main emphasis in relationship to the Sabbath was in showing that His work of redemption did not come under old covenant or rabbinical law, as He fulfilled the Sabbath by providing the true rest of which the Sabbath was a type.



### Note

<sup>1</sup> He [Jesus] even risked His mission and life in performing seven (recorded) miracles on the holy day to demonstrate that true Sabbath-keeping brought blessing not injury. Never did He defend any institution soon to pass away. Desmond Ford, *The Forgotten Day*, p. 209.



## Chapter 19

# THE SABBATH AND SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

### Introduction

I feel it is vitally important in connection with this study on the Sabbath to clarify and evaluate several Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) teachings and practices relative to this topic.<sup>1</sup>

### The Sabbath and the True Church

Many people who leave the Seventh-day Adventist church still have unanswered questions regarding which church is the “true” or “remnant” church and what part, if any, the Sabbath has in connection with the “true church.”

Seventh-day Adventists are taught to believe the SDA church is God’s last-day, true church, or “the remnant church.” The support for this belief is derived from two passages in the book of Revelation.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the *commandments of God* and hold to the *testimony of Jesus* (Rev. 12:17).

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow-servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship



God. For *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*" (Rev. 19:10).

Seventh-day Adventists believe these verses teach that the SDA church is the only, true, remnant church. Their reasoning goes like this. The "woman" represents the church. The "rest" ("remnant" K.J.V.) of her offspring must be the portion of the church living in the *last days* (our time). Revelation 12:17 lists two identifying marks of this last church: (1) It will "keep the commandments of God" and (2) "hold to the testimony of Jesus." But what is "the testimony of Jesus"? By comparing Revelation 19:10 SDAs find that the "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." They interpret "commandments of God" to mean the Ten Commandments of Sinai, including the fourth commandment, which leads them to conclude the end-time church will be a seventh-day, Sabbath-keeping church. They interpret "spirit of prophecy" to mean a last-day prophet giving a prophetic message. They believe this last-day prophet is Ellen G. White, whose writings they refer to as "*The Spirit of Prophecy*" or "*The Testimonies*." The SDA church accepts her writings as "an authoritative *source* of truth."<sup>2</sup> Seventh-day Adventists believe and teach that the SDA church is the *only, true, last-day church* because it is the *only* seventh-day, Sabbath-keeping church which has a modern-day prophet.

Is this a correct interpretation? It is based upon three fundamental assumptions: (1) "Commandments of God" must refer to the Ten Commandments of Sinai and specifically the Sabbath commandment, (2) the "testimony of Jesus" is an undefined term except for its use in Revelation 19:10, and (3) the "spirit of prophecy" must refer to a modern-day prophet. Let us study these three terms of Scripture, evaluate the underlying assumptions in the above reasoning and draw some conclusions.



## Commandments of God

The word “commandments” as used in the New Testament often may refer to one or more of the Ten Commandments. However, this term does not *always* refer to the Ten Commandments, and when it does, only *once* is it used in connection with the Sabbath commandment. That one time is:

And they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to *the commandment* (Lk. 23:56).

Other uses of the term commandment or commandments of God include the following:

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the *commandments of God*. Let each man remain in the condition in which he was called (1 Cor. 7:19,20).

The Greek word (*entolas*) used for “commandments” in Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 14:12 is used by John in his other writings as follows: <sup>3</sup>

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (Jn. 14:15). He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me . . . (Jn. 14:21). If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love . . . This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you . . . This I command you, that you love one another (Jn. 15:10,12,17).

And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us (1 Jn. 3:23,24).

And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also (1 Jn. 4:21).

By this we know that we love the children of God,



when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:2,3).

We see then, the term “commandments of God” may or may not refer to the Ten Commandments.

There is no evidence that *entolon theou* (“the commandments of God”) was a technical term which would have been understood as referring exclusively (or even primarily) to the Decalogue.<sup>4</sup>

## The testimony of Jesus

The word, “testimony” comes from a root word which in its various forms in Greek means testifying, testimony, witness and martyr. The underlying meaning is the proclamation of truth regardless of consequences. The “of Jesus” part of this phrase can be understood in two ways. It can mean the testimony *from* Jesus, or it can mean the testimony *concerning* Jesus. The first meaning stresses the fact that this testimony has Jesus as its *source*. The second meaning stresses the idea that this testimony has Jesus as the *subject matter*. Either interpretation is valid as far as the Greek syntax is concerned. Only the context can determine the preferred usage.

In other words, the phrase “testimony of Jesus” means proclaiming the truth of (either from or about) Jesus. When we stop to think about it, this is not a bad definition of the gospel. It is nothing more or less than a proclamation of the truth both from and about Jesus. From a linguistic definition we would say the “testimony of Jesus” is a term which stands for the gospel as it is fearlessly proclaimed.

Let us now look at *all* the passages in the New Testament which use the term, “testimony of Jesus” and discover how this term is used.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must



shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John; who bore witness to the word of God and to the *testimony of Jesus* Christ, even to all that he saw (Rev. 1:1,2).

And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the *testimony* which they had maintained (Rev. 6:9).

In these verses the “testimony of Jesus” or just “the testimony” is used as a term for the gospel. John <sup>bears</sup> witness to the gospel, the truth about (or from) Jesus (Rev. 1:1,2). The souls under the altar had been slain *because* they maintained the truth about (or from) Jesus. <sup>about G</sup>

With this background let us now return to the two texts in question and see if our definition of “testimony of Jesus” fits within their context.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17).

Who are these people with whom the dragon is angry? They are the people who keep the *new covenant* commandments of God and hold to the truth about (or from) Jesus! Notice the close parallel verse in Revelation 14:12.

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

It is quite evident that the term “testimony of Jesus” has reference to the gospel. It is the truth about (or from) Jesus. If this is true, then what does the Revelator mean when he says “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”?

And I [John] fell at his feet to worship him [the angel] and he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow-servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*” (Rev. 19:10).



Here the angel says he also holds the “testimony of Jesus.” In other words, the angel also believes the truth about (or from) Jesus. Focusing on the last phrase, we read, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” To paraphrase, “The truth about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Notice how this verse is variously translated or paraphrased.

Those who bear testimony to Jesus are inspired like the prophets (The New English Bible).

For the truth revealed by Jesus is the inspiration of all prophecy (Weymouth). *About God*

For the testimony of Jesus is what inspires prophecy (Goodspeed).

It is the truth concerning Jesus which inspires all prophecy (Knox).

The purpose of all prophecy and of all I have shown you is to tell about Jesus (Living Bible). *God*

These translators have captured the essence of what John is seeking to communicate. All prophecy, when rightly interpreted, in some way points to the truth concerning Jesus. *God*

You search the *Scriptures*, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and *it is these that bear witness of Me* (Jn. 5:39). *God*

“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe *in all that the prophets have spoken!* Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things *concerning Himself in all the Scriptures* (Lk. 24:25–27).

Our conclusion is that these verses have *nothing* to do with the writings of Ellen White, even if these writings are known by Seventh-day Adventists as “the Spirit of Prophecy” or “Testimonies to the Church.” John was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos *not* because he had the writings of Ellen White, not because he was a prophet, but because he held to the truth concerning Jesus. The church



derives its “trueness” as it submits to the head of the church, Jesus Christ.

We conclude that the reasoning used by Seventh-day Adventists to prove they are the true, remnant church of the last days is *faulty on every count*. First, the term “commandments of God” as used in the New Testament does not *always* refer to the Ten Commandments. The writer of Revelation uses “commandment” *many times* to refer to the new covenant commandment of love. Second, the term “testimony of Jesus” is easily defined, *both* from its own usage in Greek *and* from the way this term is used elsewhere in Revelation. It simply means the truth concerning Jesus. Third, when Scripture states that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” it has nothing to do with a last-day prophet, rather it has to do with the fact that all prophecy *of Scripture* centers in Jesus Christ. It is this truth which is the “spirit” or theme of all prophecy.

Are you looking for “the true church”? You will find no *one* human organization which is *the* true church. Rather look for a *local gathering* of Christian believers who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, who are filled with the Holy Spirit as evidenced by the exaltation of Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel, who practice water baptism and celebrate the Lord’s Supper, who study and obey God’s word, and who express their forgiven condition by loving one another. There you will find God’s true church regardless of its name.

### **The Sabbath and SDA Evangelism**

The Sabbath doctrine has proven to be a manipulative tool in Seventh-day Adventist evangelism. The evangelistic method often used is to “show” from portions of Scripture (often out of context) the binding nature of the seventh-day Sabbath, demonstrate that the SDA church keeps the Sabbath and explain to the people that if they



want to be saved and not receive the “mark of the beast” then they should join the SDA church, which is God’s *only* true, remnant church. Seventh-day Adventists teach the seventh-day Sabbath is the “seal of God” and Sunday worship will become the “mark of the beast.” <sup>5</sup> This manipulative method has brought hundreds of thousands if not millions of “converts” into the SDA church. It continues to be used in their “traditional evangelism.” <sup>6</sup> This method creates several serious problems. (1) It is unbiblical. Nowhere in the New Testament is this type of evangelism *taught* or *practiced*. Rather, New Testament evangelism is *always* a proclamation of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ! (2) The SDA “traditional evangelistic method,” as mentioned above, undermines the gospel. It takes the gospel out of the center and makes Sabbath observance “the testing truth.” <sup>7</sup> (3) It damages church unity. It is contrary to Christ’s prayer “that they may all be one” (Jn. 17:20,21). (4) It creates unneeded social concerns and economic problems for new converts. Often people are counseled to quit jobs, disobey marriage partners or parents in order to “keep the Sabbath” from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday. Thus, like the Jews of New Testament times, the observance of Sabbath law takes precedence over relationships. The paradox is that the Sabbath laws were to point forward to a restored relationship. In the new covenant, relationship takes precedence over ceremony.

### **The Sabbath and the “Seal of God”**

For Seventh-day Adventists the Sabbath holds considerable significance, more than most Christians realize. It is seen as the “testing truth” for the last days. This group believes that sometime soon true Christians will be separated from false “Christians” and the point of separation will be loyalty to God *as manifested by the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath*. Those who reject



*in sabbath observance or call attention to Sabbath*  
the “truth” of the seventh-day Sabbath message will at that time receive the mark of the beast, which they believe to be enforced Sunday worship. Thus, according to their eschatology, all Christendom will fall into one of these two camps: true seventh-day Sabbath keepers who have the “seal of God” and those who worship on Sunday who will receive the “mark of the beast.”<sup>8</sup>

This is not some sideline theology within the SDA church; it is the very *heart of traditional Adventism*. It is called “The Third Angel’s Message” (From Rev. 14:6–12). It is the basis of their official logo, which may be seen on many SDA churches and in many of their periodicals. It is this “message” which gives purpose to their existence. It is this “unique truth” which mandates their continuing presence in the world. *is truth about Not Sabbath*

Because of this understanding many who leave the Seventh-day Adventist church live under fear and guilt.<sup>9</sup> They fear they may be deceived and may end up receiving the mark of the beast rather than the seal of God. They suffer guilt since they no longer worship with the “true, remnant church.” Many who leave the SDA church feel isolated. They are not comfortable to worship in any local Christian church which worships on Sunday for fear they may receive the mark of the beast. For this reason many flounder in their spiritual life clinging desperately to friends on the fringes of the Adventist church, or to some other sabbatarian group.

The chapter, *The Testing Truth*, provides a solid, scriptural foundation for those who are uncertain about their acceptance with God. However, for now let us look at the SDA doctrine regarding the Sabbath and the Seal of God.

The following quotation is taken from the SDA “Summary of Doctrinal Beliefs” as found on the back of their Certificate of Baptism.

The seventh day of the week is the eternal sign of



Christ's power as Creator and Redeemer, and is therefore the Lord's day, or the Christian Sabbath, constituting the seal of the living God. It should be observed from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday.

The traditional support for the seventh-day Sabbath as the seal of God comes from the common understanding of what a seal is: it is a mark which shows authenticity by (1) giving the *name* of the one in authority, (2) the *title* of the one in authority, and (3) the *dominion* of the one in authority. Seventh-day Adventists show that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment has all of this information: "The Lord" (name), "The Lord your God" (title), "made the heavens and the earth, and sea and all that is in them" (dominion).

This may be good human reasoning, but the New Testament *never* speaks of the Sabbath as the seal of God. Because the Sabbath commandment was placed in the very center of the Ten Commandments, it served as the dynastic seal of the Sinaitic Covenant. On several occasions within the old covenant we find the Sabbath called a *sign*. In context it is *always* the sign between God and the sons of Israel.

But speak to the *sons of Israel*, saying "You shall surely observe My *sabbaths*; for this is a *sign between Me and you* throughout your generations" (Ex. 31:13).

It [the Sabbath] is a *sign between Me and the sons of Israel* forever (Ex. 31:17).

And also I gave them My *sabbaths* to be a *sign between Me and them* that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them (Ez. 20:12).

I am the Lord your God; walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and observe them. And sanctify My *sabbaths*; and they shall be a *sign between Me and you*, that you may know that I am the Lord your God (Ez. 20:20).

*Never* is the Sabbath called a seal or a sign within the new covenant. Rather, the *Holy Spirit* is said to be the



seal which the Christian receives when he believes.

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us in God, who also *sealed* us and gave us the *Spirit* in our hearts as a pledge (2 Cor. 1:21,22).

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were *sealed* in Him with the *Holy Spirit* of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:13,14).

And do not grieve the *Holy Spirit* of God, by whom you were *sealed* for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

According to Scripture the seventh-day Sabbath is *not* the seal of God. According to the New Testament the seventh-day Sabbath is not the sign which is to be remembered by Christians, rather Christians are to celebrate the Lord's Supper (the new covenant sign) in remembrance of Christ.

### To My Seventh-day Adventist Friends

Several years ago when I conducted a seven-month study of the Sabbath I felt no compulsion to persuade any of you to change your beliefs concerning the Sabbath. Nor did I feel that way when I started to write this book. However, as I have restudied this subject in greater depth, especially in the light of the covenants, I now feel I must share with you my deep concern. Prayerfully consider the following.

Seventh-day Adventists believe they will be judged in relation to the Ten Commandment law of Sinai. They believe the Sabbath is the seal of God, the seal of the covenant under which they live, and use the reference in Exodus 31:12–17 to support this view. They believe the Sabbath is the “testing truth” for the last days. Remember however what Scripture clearly teaches. The Ten Commandments are the *words* of the Sinaitic Covenant. The seventh-day Sabbath is the *sign* of the Sinaitic



Covenant. The Sinaitic Covenant was made *only* with the “sons of Israel.” The Sabbath is at the *very heart* of the Sinaitic Covenant and is *inseparably connected* with every aspect of it. The New Testament calls the Sinaitic Covenant the “first” or “old” covenant. The New Testament says this “first” or “old” covenant is obsolete, is ready to disappear and should be “thrown out.” Paul said those who want to be under this covenant must keep *all* the stipulations of this covenant or they are *cursed*. Paul says those who keep this covenant for religious reasons have *fallen from grace*. If you are seeking to be under this law, remember

There is no partiality with God . . . all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified (Rom. 2:11–13).

Paul says that required Sabbath observance *undermines the gospel*. It has been my experience, personally, and in working with hundreds of others, that this is true. When the Galatians started observing days, months, seasons, and years Paul was fearful that he had labored over them in vain.

Then, there is the dilemma of *Sabbath observance*. If the Sabbath of Sinai is to be kept, it must be observed with certain *behavior*. Endless discussions will never do away with biblical statements. There is no biblical evidence which suggests that some of the Old Testament Sabbath commands are still to be followed while others are not. There is little logic in the way Seventh-day Adventists observe certain of the old covenant Sabbath commands while neglecting others.<sup>10</sup> The chief support for their form of Sabbath observance is in dependence upon the writings of Ellen White. However, who is willing to keep the Sabbath according to her rules? <sup>11</sup> Few can measure up to all of her Sabbath laws, and if one doesn't he is under condemnation.<sup>12</sup> Yet if one does keep



all the Sabbath rules laid down by Ellen White he must again face Scripture for she, herself, says,

God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms (E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595).

The biblical laws for Sabbath observance include *all* the following: not going out of one's place, not baking or boiling, not doing *any* work, not building a fire, not buying or selling, not carrying a load or burden, not doing your own pleasure. The commands for Sabbath observance were to keep it holy, to have a day of *complete* rest, observe, do, or celebrate, and delight oneself in the Lord. Sabbaths were to be carefully observed from sundown Friday to sundown Sabbath. Penalties for the violation of the Sabbath were to be put to death and cut off from the covenant people. Again I ask, how is one to observe the Sabbath?

As pointed out above it is the *Holy Spirit*, *not the Sabbath, that is the biblical seal of God*.

I know many of you have an understanding of the gospel. I know many of you are trusting Christ for your salvation. I know many of you are honestly seeking to follow God. Make sure your understanding of the Sabbath and the covenants is *biblical*. It is my prayer that this book may in some small way lead you to a fuller understanding of the Sabbath and the covenants, but more importantly, to a closer *relationship with the Lord*, who says

Come to *Me*, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and *I will give you rest*. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and *you shall find rest for your souls*. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light (Mt. 11:28–30).



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The author was a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, grew up in an Adventist home, received all of his schooling from first grade through graduate school in SDA educational institutions, taught Bible in a SDA educational institution, and served as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor for a number of years.

<sup>2</sup> One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is *an identifying mark of the remnant church* and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a *continuing and authoritative source of truth* which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28,29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.) Doctrinal point #19 taken from *Fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, as revised at the Fifty-third Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists held in Dallas, Texas, April 17-26, 1980. (Emphasis supplied.)

<sup>3</sup> This assumes that John the Evangelist is the same person as John the Revelator, which some question.

<sup>4</sup> D. R. De Lacy, *The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus*, in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty; for it is the point of truth especially controverted . . . The fourth commandment . . . contains the seal of God, affixed to His law as evidence of its authenticity and binding force. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers [in context, Sunday worship], receive the mark of the beast, the other, choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God. E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

<sup>6</sup> By keeping the seventh day holy, God's people show their loyalty to their Creator and Recreator. God designed the seventh-day Sabbath to be His sign or seal to distinguish those who worship Him from those who do not . . . Those who keep the Sabbath receive God's seal and demonstrate their loyalty to Him. In contrast, those who reject God's control and choose to follow the beast power receive its mark. (See Revelation 13:16,17.) The contrast is clear. R. Russell Holt, *Signs of the Times* (the missionary journal of SDAs), February and March 1990, "The Last Chance Message." The book, *The Ultimate Rip-off*, by Bill Stringfellow, Concerned Publications, gives



a popular—if not sensational—presentation of the “traditional Adventist” evangelistic agenda.

<sup>7</sup> Before Jesus comes, the entire world will stand divided over the great issue of loyalty to God and His commandments—especially the fourth commandment . . . Loyalty to God and His commandments will be the test. *Ibid.* The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

<sup>8</sup> The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Lord’s memorial of creation. “The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.” Exodus 31:12,13. Here the Sabbath is clearly designated as a sign between God and His people. The Mark of the beast is the opposite—the observance of the first day of the week. This mark distinguishes those who acknowledge the supremacy of the papal authority from those who acknowledge the authority of God. E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> It is Satan’s plan to weaken the faith of God’s people [SDA members] in the *Testimonies* [Writings of Ellen G. White]. Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition. When the *Testimonies*, which were once believed, are doubted and given up, Satan knows the deceived one will not stop at this; and he redoubles his efforts till he launches them into open rebellion, which becomes incurable and ends up in destruction. E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 335.

<sup>10</sup> Seventh-day Adventists in general follow many of the old covenant laws regarding Sabbath observance, yet the author has never known any to follow the clear biblical law, “You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day” (Ex. 35:3).

<sup>11</sup> On Friday let the preparation for the Sabbath be completed. See that all the clothing is in readiness and that all the cooking is done. Let the boots be blacked and the baths taken. It is possible to do this. If you make it a rule you can do it. The Sabbath is not to be given to the repairing of garments, to the cooking of food, to pleasure seeking or to any other worldly employment. Before the setting of the sun let all secular work be laid aside and all secular papers be put out of sight. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 355. Let not the



precious hours of the Sabbath be wasted in bed. On Sabbath morning the family should be astir early. *Ibid.*, p. 357

<sup>12</sup> If we desire the blessing promised to the obedient, we must observe the Sabbath more strictly. I fear that we often travel on this day when it might be avoided. In harmony with the light which the Lord has given in regard to the observance of the Sabbath, we should be more careful about traveling on the boats or cars on this day . . . When starting on a journey we should make every possible effort to plan so as to avoid the company of those who would draw our attention to worldly things . . . We should not talk about matters of business or engage in any common, worldly conversation. At all times and in all places God requires us to prove our loyalty to Him by honoring the Sabbath. *Ibid.*, p. 360. God requires that His holy day be as sacredly observed now as in the time of Israel. The command given to the Hebrews should be regarded by all Christians as an injunction from Jehovah to them. E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 296. Those who would in any way lessen the force of the sharp reproofs which God has given me to speak, must meet their work at the judgment. E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 19. If you feel just as safe in following your own impulses as in following the light given by God's delegated servant [E. G. White], the peril is your own; you will be condemned because you rejected the light which heaven had sent to you. *Ibid.*, p. 674. It is Satan's plan to weaken the faith of God's people in the *Testimonies*. *Ibid.*, p. 672. God has given sufficient evidence so that all who desire to do so may satisfy themselves as to the character of the *Testimonies*; and, having acknowledged them to be from God, it is their duty to accept reproof, even though they do not themselves see the sinfulness of their course . . . Those who despise the warning will be left in blindness to become self-deceived; *Ibid.*, p. 682.

Author's note: The quotations from Ellen G. White in footnote 12 express the cultic control of fear and guilt. This is *not* God's method. He invites us to come and reason together (Isa. 1:18). It is the *love of Christ* which controls us (2 Cor. 5:14). God invites us to study *for ourselves* and compare what others say with the truth of Scripture (Acts 17:11). We should never allow the keeping of our souls to be given to another human being. In essence, Ellen White is saying that if a person once believed in her writings, and then rejected them, he/she is lost.



## Chapter 20

### ASSEMBLING AND RESTING

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the [most] holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; *not forsaking our own assembling together*, as is the habit of some but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:19–25).

It is important for us to hear what these verses teach. Those of us who have come from a strict Sabbath-keeping background can appreciate one thing about the Sabbath. It made us take time to focus our attention on God. While the new covenant is not concerned with specific times and places, it does, nonetheless, stress the importance of meeting together on a regular basis and taking time to be with the Lord.

I have observed from my own life and the lives of others who have left the Seventh-day Adventist church, that once the Sabbath is no longer kept, it is very easy to work seven days a week and begin to crowd out time for God. Actually, nothing could be more foreign to the New Testament record. Rather, I believe this problem stems from the “pendulum effect.” When the restrictions were taken away, it was easy to let the pendulum swing too far



into personal freedom. It is for this reason that I have included this short chapter which deals with Christian assembly and physical rest.

### **Christian Assembly/Church Attendance**

The verses quoted above give several admonitions and I believe also tell us how to keep these admonitions. The following may help.

- Let us draw near . . . in full assurance
- Let us hold fast the confession of our hope
- Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds

(by)

- not forsaking our own assembling together

### **Fellowship necessary for faith**

All Christians should understand why regular Christian meetings and regular time devoted to God are so necessary. In the new covenant we are saved, not by works, but *by faith*.

And without *faith* it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must *believe* that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

So *faith* comes from *hearing* and hearing by the *word of Christ* (Rom. 10:17).

The early church had a living faith in their Lord. We have this short, but important, description of its activities.

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were *continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer* (Acts 2:41,42).



## Christ is present in Christian fellowship

Jesus said that where two or three are gathered together He would be in their midst (Mt. 18:20). And the appearances of the risen Lord, most of which were on the first day of the week, are designed to teach us the *reality* of His promise. When Christians come together for the celebration of the Lord's Supper His presence is manifest, especially in the breaking of the bread.

Today we live in a secular culture and are constantly bombarded with information which is targeted to undermine our faith. In order to combat this we must be careful to regularly feed upon the word of God. It is *only* when we meet together with other Christians that we are able to follow the admonition of Hebrews 10. It is imperative that Christians meet together on a *regular* basis to experience the presence of the risen Lord.

## Fellowship needed for personal growth

In the new covenant, the Holy Spirit fills the place which the law held in the old. (See Chapter 12.) It is the Holy Spirit that guides the believer in how to implement the new covenant law of love. Therefore we find Paul's beautiful exposition on love recorded in 1 Corinthians 13 sandwiched between 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14, two chapters dealing with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In these chapters Paul shows how *all* Christians have some gift of the Spirit. In order for these gifts to operate, the church must *come together* in order to become the "body of Christ." It is only within the fellowship of believers that the Holy Spirit can lead us to become all that He wants us to be. Each Christian is likened to an organ of the body with every Christian ministering to and receiving ministry from every other "organ" of Christ's "body." In His final talk with the disciples before His death, Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one



another, just as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:12). Just as the “book of the law” interpreted and applied the “tablets of the law” in the old covenant so the epistles interpret and apply the law of love in the new covenant. One-another ministry is an example of this interpretation and application. One-another ministry is not an option if we are to experience authentic Christianity. Following is a partial list of “one-another” passages in the New Testament which serve to guide us in one-another ministry:

- Greet one another. Rom. 16:16
- Accept one another. Rom. 15:7
- Be kind to one another. Eph. 4:32
- Care for one another. 1 Cor. 12:25
- Be at peace with one another. Mk 9:50
- Be members of one another. Eph. 4:25
- Be devoted to one another. Rom. 12:10
- Give preference to one another. Rom. 12:10
- Be of the same mind toward one another. Rom. 12:16
- Admonish one another. Rom. 15:14
- Wait for one another. 1 Cor. 11:33
- Bear one another’s burdens. Gal. 6:2
- Show forbearance to one another. Eph. 4:2
- Be subject to one another. Eph. 5:21
- Bear with one another. Col. 3:13
- Teach one another. Col. 3:16
- Comfort one another. 1 Thess. 4:18
- Stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Heb. 10:24
- Confess your sins [faults] to one another. Jam. 5:16
- Pray for one another. Jam. 5:16
- Forgive one another. Col. 3:13
- Be hospitable to one another. 1 Pet. 4:9
- Build up one another. 1 Thess. 5:11
- Encourage one another. 1 Thess. 5:11
- Serve one another. Gal. 5:13

### **Pastoral teaching needed for spiritual growth**

Every Christian does not have the skill, time or training



to be a thorough Bible student. It is the duty of the pastor to “equip the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). Thus it is important for the Christian to receive weekly teaching from one who does have the skill, time and training to dig out the precious ore of Bible truth and refine it so that it is relevant for today. This does not mean the Christian is to blindly follow what the pastor says. Nor does it mean that the Christian layperson cannot be individually guided in his Bible study by the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Christian is to examine the Scriptures *himself* to see if the pastor’s teaching is true. (See Acts 17:11.) But a Christian who does not regularly attend Bible study and church is going to be stunted in his personal growth. Our Lord wants us all to experience authentic, dynamic Christianity; therefore, He gives us pastoral leaders.

### Fellowship needed for evangelism

The church is commissioned to take the gospel to all the world (Mt. 28:18–20). The fellowship of believers plays an important part in this expansion of the church. It was the church that sent out Paul and Barnabas on their missionary trips (Acts 13:1–3). The Philippian church on several occasions sent money to Paul so he could spend more time in peaching the gospel (Phil. 4:15,16).

The New Testament knows nothing about Christians who are outside of fellowship. Even when they were in jail, the New Testament Christians wrote letters to encourage others to hold fast their faith in Christ (2 Tim. 4). Those who were not in jail visited and encouraged those who were (Phil. 2:25). The underlying dynamic of new covenant life is *relationship*. And regular fellowship is a prerequisite for relationship.

Thus, with the fellowship present in New Testament times even Paul’s imprisonment was an asset to the spread of the gospel.



Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that *most of the brethren*, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, *have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear* (Phil. 1:12,13).

## Fellowship needed for worship

It is true that the Christian can worship God by himself.

Through Him then let us *continually* offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Heb. 13:15,16).

It is equally true that the Christian can experience complete, corporate worship only in fellowship with other Christians. In Acts 4:24–30 we have the account of the congregation lifting up “their voice to God with one accord.” After this time of rehearsing God’s power and His work and praying that they might

    speak Thy word with all confidence . . . the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

Thus, it is imperative that Christians have a regular time for worship. It is imperative that they assemble together in order to strengthen their faith, to meet in Christ’s presence, for personal Christian growth, for the extension of the kingdom, and for corporate worship.

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the [most] holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water.



Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some*, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:19–25).

## Physical Rest

There is little *direct* teaching in the New Testament regarding physical rest. However, from what is recorded and from basic principles which are clearly stated the Christian is not left without guidance.

### Jesus and physical rest

It appears that for Jesus the Sabbath was not His main time for physical rest and relaxation. Often His Sabbaths were filled with teaching in the synagogue followed by some type of ministry.

... He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read (Lk. 4:16).

And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on Sabbath days ... (Lk. 4:31)

And it came about on another Sabbath, that He entered the synagogue and was teaching ... (Lk. 6:6)

Most pastors will tell you that their hardest day is the day of worship. Preaching, teaching and personal ministry can be exhausting. For Jesus, however, His “work” often did not end when the synagogue service was over. On one occasion, after the conclusion of the synagogue service, Jesus went to the home of Peter and healed his mother-in-law (Lk. 4:38,39). After sundown, Jesus ministered to the crowd which had gathered (Lk. 4:40,41). On another occasion He was invited to the home of a Pharisee for Sabbath dinner and ended up healing a man with dropsy and having a confrontation with the Pharisees (Lk. 14:1-6).



It is clear, however, that Jesus did take time for rest and relaxation. After a full Sabbath of ministry we find Jesus seeking to get away from the multitudes.

And when day came, He departed and went to a lonely place . . . (Lk. 4:42)

And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there (Mk. 1:35).

It appears from the gospel record that Jesus had a *regular habit* of slipping away to some place of solitude for rest, private prayer and meditation.

But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray (Lk. 5:16).

And it was at this time He went off to the mountain to pray . . . (Lk. 6:12)

Jesus taught His disciples by example and personal association. Thus, after Jesus and His disciples had been involved in intense times of ministry, He would say to them,

“Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.” (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves (Mk. 6:30–32).

After Jesus heard about the death of John the Baptist,

He withdrew from there in a boat, to a lonely place by Himself . . . (Mt. 14:13)

Not only do we have the example of Jesus to guide us, but we also have fundamental principles. The New Testament teaches that our bodies are temples of God.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought



with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

In context, Paul is not dealing with physical rest, rather he is addressing the problem of immorality. However, one characteristic of the new covenant is that instead of there being many specific laws to follow, we have a few basic principles *which can be applied to differing situations* as the need demands. Such is the case here. Because our bodies are temples of God, then it becomes a part of Christian discipline to care for our bodies so that we can be in the best of health and thus give to God the most effective service. Regular times of physical rest are required for sound mental, physical and spiritual health. Not only will the Christian plan his schedule for worship and physical rest, but he will also eat, drink, sleep, exercise, and breathe for optimal physical, mental and spiritual health.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship (Rom. 12:1).

### **Conclusion**

It is my conclusion that the day of worship is often an excellent day to devote to the things of God by setting aside one's regular work. However, the Christian must remember he is not under the old covenant Sabbath laws. Rather, he should be guided by the general principles of the new covenant, including the principles of health, which may be applied differently for different situations, to bring glory to God. While the New Testament gives several admonitions regarding the worship service itself, it has no specific behavior requirements regarding what one should, or should not do, before, or after, the worship service. It does, however, give general principles to guide us. Therefore, the Christian living under the new covenant



may experience total rest. He will, as a believer, experience the “rest of grace” and find true rest for his soul. He will also live in such a way that will bring glory to God in all that he does, including getting the physical rest appropriate for his needs.

### Chapter Summary

1. It is vitally important for Christians to assemble together on a regular basis.
  - a. Fellowship is necessary for faith.
  - b. Christ is present in Christian fellowship.
  - c. Fellowship is needed for “one-another ministry” necessary for the development of the Christian’s potential.
  - d. Pastoral teaching is needed for spiritual growth.
  - e. Fellowship is needed for the implementation and support of evangelism.
  - f. Fellowship is needed for complete, corporate worship.
2. The New Testament has little *direct* teaching regarding physical rest.
3. From the example of Jesus we learn the following:
  - a. Jesus often taught during the synagogue services on Sabbath.
  - b. After the synagogue service was over, Jesus often continued His ministry.
  - c. It was the regular habit of Jesus to go out to a lonely place for rest, prayer and meditation. Often these occasions came after a busy day of ministry.
  - d. Jesus taught His disciples to take time from their successful ministry and encouraged them to go out to a place of solitude.
4. From basic principles in the new covenant we learn that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and should be cared for by keeping them in good health.



- a. The Christian should sleep, eat, drink, exercise and breathe for optimal physical, mental and spiritual health.
  - b. These principles may be applied differently under different situations with the intended result to bring glory to God.
5. While the New Testament gives several admonitions regarding the worship service itself, it has no specific behavior requirements regarding what one should, or should not do, before, or after, the worship service.



You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free . . . I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me . . . If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.



## Chapter 21

### THE TESTING TRUTH

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I want to bring hope and a biblical understanding of “the testing truth” to the many thousands who have left church fellowship over the past years and who are experiencing a certain amount of uncertainty regarding their assurance of salvation. Second, perhaps this material will be of help to others who minister to those who come from legalistic, sabbatarian backgrounds.

In Colossians 2:16 Paul listed the Sabbath as one of the things which undermined a Christian’s standing in Christ. It has been my experience that sabbatarians do not often have a clear understanding of the gospel. For this reason, it is vital to our study to outline the way of salvation as set forth in the new covenant. This will serve two purposes. First, it will help those who read this book, who may come from backgrounds where the gospel was not clearly understood, to find a solid base for their acceptance with God. Second, it will show how the continued observance of the Sinaitic Sabbath undermines that assurance. With this short introduction, let us examine what the New Testament teaches regarding the way of salvation and what it defines as the testing truth.



## Salvation in the New Covenant

### Eternal life is a free gift

The wages of sin is death, but the *free gift* of God is eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

*Not* by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to *His mercy* He saved us (Tit. 3:5).

Being justified as a *gift by His grace* through the redemption which is *in Christ Jesus* (Rom. 3:24).

The good news of the new-covenant gospel is that the “work” of salvation has *already been completed*. Never let anyone take away the glad tidings of the new covenant gospel. Salvation is a free gift based upon the work of Jesus Christ!

### God has given us heaven’s best

I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly (Jn. 10:10).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will (Eph. 1:3–5).

Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us (Eph. 3:20).

### In ourselves we are all sinful and lost

It is a good thing that salvation is free, for God’s word clearly teaches that we all sin in the following ways. First, by our *own actions we have all sinned*.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

An understanding of the Greek verbs used in this verse adds additional insight. “Have sinned” refers to past



actions of sin. However, “fall short” relates to a *present ongoing activity*. A literal rendering of the last part of this verse would read, “and *continue* to fall short of the glory of God.” This verse means that those who are seeking to be justified by their own right behavior will not make it. For we all have sinned *in the past* and we all *continue* to fall short of God’s requirement.

A second way we all sin is by the *sin of thought*.

Everyone who is *angry* . . . shall be guilty (Mt. 5:22).

Everyone who looks on a woman to *lust* for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Mt. 5:28).

A third way we all sin is by the *sin of neglect*. Jesus said,

To the extent that you did *not* do it to one of the least of these, you did it *not* unto me (Mt. 25:45).

How many times have we neglected to do good to someone who was in need?

A fourth way we all sin is through the sin of *lack of faith*.

Whatever is *not of faith* is sin (Rom. 14:23).

Then if these four ways were not enough to condemn us all, there is yet a fifth which we cannot escape.

We too . . . were *by nature* children of wrath (Eph. 2:3).

If we are depending upon *our own* good behavior for our right standing with God not one of us has the slightest chance! Under the new covenant, however, there is a way!

### **Love finds a way**

God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever



believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16).

God knew there was no way we could be good enough to make it to heaven so He graciously provided a way of salvation which would meet our needs.

### Jesus Christ is the only way

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (Jn. 14:6).

Jesus calls Himself the "good shepherd" and says,

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be *saved*, and shall go in and out, and find pasture (Jn. 10:9,11).

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be *saved* (Acts 4:12).

It is important to remember that in the New Testament the covenant partners are God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's elect One. He is a "covenant to the people." The old covenant was made between God and the promises of "the sons of Israel." The old covenant was faulty because the "sons of Israel" could not keep their promises. wouldn't

For finding fault with them . . . Says the Lord . . . I will effect a new covenant (Heb. 8:8).

The new covenant is far better for us than was the old covenant in that we are not the ones who must keep the covenant contract. The loving behavior and righteous living of *Jesus* satisfied the new covenant.

We shall be saved by *His life* (Rom. 5:10).

So then as through one transgression [Adam's] there resulted condemnation to all men; even so through *one act of righteousness* [Jesus'] there resulted justification of life to *all men* (Rom. 5:18).



While the new covenant is better *for us*, it was costly *for Jesus*. Under the old covenant the sons of Israel were the ones who had to demonstrate covenant loyalty by their obedience to the commandments. Under the new it is Christ. Under the old covenant the sons of Israel received the curses of the broken covenant. In the new covenant we find that,

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

Under the old covenant atonement for sin was typified by the death of animals. However, under the new covenant Christ, Himself, gave His life to reconcile us to Himself.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3).

### **The new covenant and us**

Salvation is a free gift. We are all sinners on at least five counts. God saw our predicament and out of His gracious love made a new and better covenant. In the new covenant it is Christ's behavior, not ours, which matters. Now we must ask how this affects us. How do we participate in the blessings of the new covenant? The following is vital to our understanding of personal salvation and our understanding of the Sabbath. Here is the important question: How do I as a sinner become incorporated into the blessings of the new covenant if Jesus is the covenant partner?

First, let us see how we do *not* enter into the new covenant blessings.

He saved us, *not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness*, but according to His mercy, by the



washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5).

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith *apart from works of the Law* (Rom. 3:28).

You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

*These are forceful verses of Scripture for those who seek to make the keeping of Sabbath a testing truth which will determine a person's eternal destiny!*

If our good behavior will not entitle us to the blessings of the new covenant, what will?

For by grace you have been saved *through faith*; not as a result of works, that no one should boast (Eph. 2:8,9).

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who *believes* has eternal life (Jn. 6:47).

Unless you *believe* that I am He you shall die in your sins (Jn. 8:24).

They said therefore to Him, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He has sent" (Jn. 6:29).

... that is the *word of faith* which we are preaching, that *if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved*; for with the heart man *believes*, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever *believes* in Him will not be disappointed." (Rom. 10:8-11).

Scripture is not muddy or unclear regarding the way of salvation in the new covenant. It was the work of Jesus to provide the righteousness we needed. He did it. It was the work of Jesus to receive the curse of the broken covenant. He did it. It is our work to believe in Him, and in so doing we enter by faith into the blessings of the new covenant—without works. Under the new covenant salvation is by grace through faith in Christ.

But what do we mean by "faith" and "belief"? The



story is told of a tight-rope walker who a number of years ago strung a cable across Niagara Falls. The newspapers carried the story that he was going to walk across this dangerous place on a given day. That day hundreds gathered to watch this man perform his risky skill. Shortly before he was to go out on the cable this tight-rope walker made his way into the crowd. He would approach people and ask them if they believed he could make it across without falling to his death? Most said he could. He came up to a young man and said, "Do you believe I can safely walk across this cable above the falls?"

"Yes," answered the young man. "You are a tight-rope walker and have the necessary skills to do it."

"Do you *really believe* I can do it?" responded the tight-rope walker.

"Yes, I really believe you can do it," answered the young man.

"Good," said the tight-rope walker. "You are just the person I am looking for. I want to push this wheelbarrow across the falls and I want you to sit in it!"

Did the young man get in? No, for his "belief" was only an *intellectual concept*; it was not *trust*. He was not willing to trust his life to his belief. When Scripture speaks of faith or belief (they are the same words in Greek) it means *both* belief and trust. In other words, the condition for salvation in the new covenant is simply to *believe* in who Jesus is—the divine Son of God who lived the perfect life, died for our sins, and was raised from the dead for our justification—and *trust* our eternal salvation to what He did. We must, so to speak, climb into the wheelbarrow and let Christ push us across. We must recognize there is no way we can ever be good enough. We must trust our very life to His work.



## God wants Christians to live a life of full assurance

But as many as received Him to them He gave the *right* to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (Jn. 1:12).

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to *forgive* us our sins and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9).

Therefore, having been justified by *faith*, we *have peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, *having now been reconciled*, we shall be saved by *His life* (Rom. 5:10).

In the new covenant we can come with confidence into the very presence of God because of the blood of Jesus.

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the [most] holy place by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19).

## God wants us to experience true “rest”

The writer of Hebrews says, “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” He admonishes us to “be diligent to enter that rest.” And he says “we who have *believed* enter that rest” (Heb. 4:3,9,11). Christians who believe enter the “*rest*” of *fellowship with God*, the “rest” of Eden’s seventh day when all was very good. You see, we are *now* a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). We are now by faith seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). We are *now* members of God’s family (Jn. 1:12). We *now* have the Holy Spirit living in us. Jesus said,

If anyone loves Me he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and *We will come to him, and make Our abode with him* (Jn. 14:23).

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that *you also may have fellowship with us*; and indeed *our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus*



*Christ.* And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete (1 Jn. 1:4).

This intimate fellowship with the Lord is the “rest” which “remains.” This is the “rest” which can be entered “today.” This is the true “rest” Jesus had in mind when He said,

Come unto Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find *rest for your souls*. For My yoke is easy and My load is light (Mt. 11:28–30).

According to the New Testament the testing truth is faith in Jesus. It is *not* the seventh-day Sabbath of the Sinaitic Covenant.

But . . . ?

But cannot my continued observance of the Sinaitic, seventh-day Sabbath still bring honor to God both as Creator and Savior? Our answer to this must be characterized by love or we have missed the very heart of the new covenant. Yet at the same time we must be as clear and forceful as Scripture. For *Jewish Christians* Paul’s answer was “let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.” However, if Sabbath observance is seen as a *requirement for salvation*, a “*testing truth*” or as a *sign of the covenant*, our answer must be an *unequivocal no*. First, the seventh-day Sabbath of Sinai pointed back to the seventh-day rest of God and it pointed forward to the rest of Christ: renewed fellowship with God. But now that Christ has come, the pointer loses its function. *The new covenant has only two ceremonies: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.* Under the old covenant a person was to “*remember the Sabbath*” (Ex. 20:8). Under the new covenant Jesus said, “Do this [celebrate the Lord’s



Supper] in *remembrance of Me*" (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23–26).

Second, to continue to observe the Sinaitic Sabbath means putting yourself back under a list of dos and don'ts. Observing the Sinaitic Sabbath is meaningless unless you are ready to observe it the way God required it to be observed at Sinai. Of what value is Sabbath observance unless it is done according to biblical guidelines? To put yourself back under the Sinaitic Covenant, however, means to fall from grace.

Third, to continue to observe the Sinaitic Sabbath *adds nothing to your righteousness*, but it takes away from what should be a present reality: intimate fellowship with God. Giving the Sabbath importance now that Christ has come is analogous to a new bride spending her time looking at her husband's picture while he sits alone. It is like the Pharisees in John 9 who were desperately seeking to abide by all the Sabbath laws yet completely missed the fellowship of Him to whom the laws pointed. It is like eating a peanut butter sandwich out of a brown bag while sitting at a <sup>sumptuously</sup> laden banquet table. It is like worshiping the thing made in place of worshiping the Creator Himself. Paul was fearful of those who wanted to continue to observe old covenant celebrations, including the Sabbath. He felt it undermined their complete standing in Christ. He described these celebrations as weak and worthless—a mere shadow of what was to come. *Can we do otherwise?*

## New covenant obedience

As was brought out in the chapters on the new covenant, love is the fulfilling of the law. It is true that anything which is unloving is sin under the new covenant. Here are several New Testament lists of sins, and *Sabbath breaking is never mentioned*.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are:

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immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who [continue to] practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19).

Strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances (2 Cor. 12:20).

But for the cowardly and *unbelieving* and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

Paul's ministry is described in these words.

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have *fully* preached the gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:18,19).

Here Paul says that he led the Gentile churches into obedience in *both word and deed*. He says he *fully preached* the Gospel. Yet *never* in any of his letters did he ever admonish his readers, Jewish or non-Jewish, to keep the Sabbath. Never did he mention Sabbath breaking in his lists of sins. It should be obvious that the Sabbath was *not* a part of Paul's Gospel. Rather he saw the Sabbath as something which *undermined* the new covenant testing truth: salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Can we do otherwise?

### Violating new covenant signs

In the new covenant the Holy Spirit fulfills the function which the law held in the old. The entrance sign into the new covenant is baptism, which should be closely associated with the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Having also believed, you were *sealed* in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our



inheritance . . . And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were *sealed* for the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13,14; 4:30).

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is our guarantee, or *seal*, of open, face-to-face communion with God. In Acts 5 we have recorded the tragic experience of two people who lied to the Holy Spirit and were stricken dead.

In connection with a misuse of the Lord's Supper, the new covenant sign, Paul gives these insightful words.

For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep [have died] (1 Cor. 11:30).

As in the old covenant so in the new, the signs of the covenant are important to God, but *we must make sure we know which covenant we are under and remember to celebrate the right signs!*

### Prayer of Commitment

Lord Jesus, come into my heart right now. Make me the person You want me to be. I know I am a sinner and need your forgiveness and grace. I no longer trust what I can do for salvation but I trust in what You have done for me. Thank You for accepting me, forgiving me, and giving me the assurance of eternal life. Thank You that I can enter into *Your rest today: the rest which remains for the one who believes*.

"If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth and *the truth shall set you free*" (Jn. 8:31,32).



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